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EDITORIAL PREFACE

> Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

No section of the population of India can afford to neglect her ancient heritage. In her literature, philosophy, art, and regulated life there is much that is worthless, much also that is distinctly unhealthy; yet the treasures of knowledge, wisdom, and beauty which they contain are too precious to be lost. Every citizen of India needs to use them, if he is to be a cultured modern Indian. This is as true of the Christian, the Muslim, the Zoroastrian as of the Hindu. But, while the heritage of India has been largely explored by scholars, and the results of their toil are laid out for us in their books, they cannot be said to be really available for the ordinary man. The volumes are in most cases expensive, and are often technical and difficult. Hence this series of cheap books has been planned by a group of Christian men, in order that every educated Indian, whether rich or poor, may be able to find his way into the treasures of India's past. Many Europeans, both in India and elsewhere, will doubtless be glad to use the series.

The utmost care is being taken by the General Editors in selecting writers, and in passing manuscripts for the press. To every book two tests are rigidly applied: everything must be scholarly, and everything must be sympathetic. The purpose is to bring the best out of the ancient treasuries, so that it may be known, enjoyed, and used.

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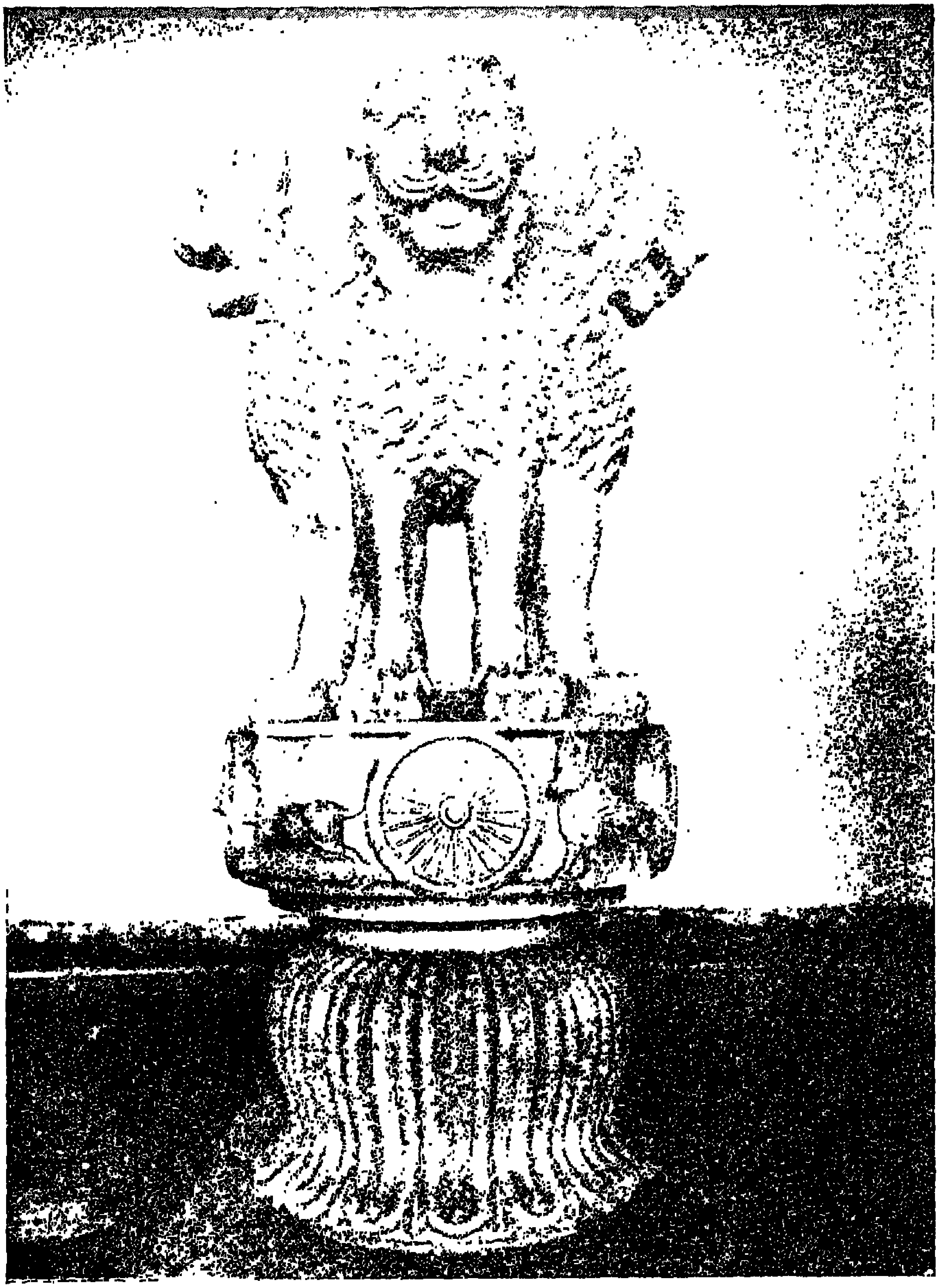

THE LION PILLAR CAPITAL OF SARNATH. (P. 56).

(From a photograph by the Archæological Survey of India.)

THE HERITAGE OF INDIA

ASOKA

BY

JAMES M. MACPHAIL, M.A., M.D.,

UNITED FREE CHURCH MISSION, BAMDAH.

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INDIA

INTRODUCTION

In the history of ancient India, the figure of Asoka stands out like some great Himalayan peak, clear against the sky, resplendent in the sun, while the lower and nearer ranges are hidden by the clouds.

As an historical figure, his character has to-day a two-fold interest for us: political and religious. He was the most illustrious member of a great and powerful dynasty, which has left indelible traces of its achievements on Indian history, and he was the leader in his own day of a spiritual movement which, spreading far with profound effect, marked an epoch in the history of the Eastern world, and has exercised a religious influence upon a third of the human race.

It was inevitable that there should be a large admixture of legend and myth in the mass of tradition that has gathered round the name of Asoka: the same is true of all the heroes of antiquity who have impressed themselves on the popular imagination; of the English King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, of the good King Alfred, and of St. Louis, the saintly King of France; but a remarkable fact about Asoka is that we have at our disposal, clearly distinguishable from the almost unlimited amount of myth, a limited but still very considerable amount of authentic and indisputable evidence of a most interesting kind, by which he is brought nearer to us and made more real than any other monarch of ancient days in India. Recently this evidence has been accumulating. The researches of scholars and the excavations of the Archæological Survey have combined to place at our disposal fresh sources of information, in some cases confirming what had previously been conjecture, and in others adding to the sum of ascertained knowledge new facts of very great value.

To understand the place that Asoka held in Indian history and the work he did, it is necessary to consider

briefly what may be termed his natural and also his spiritual pedigree, to trace, that is to say, the story of the Maurya dynasty and also the origin of Buddhism.

While no historian of India can ignore Asoka and while every student of religion must take Buddha into account, there are two writers to whom all who are interested in these subjects owe a very special debt of obligation. Mr. Vincent A. Smith, of the Indian Civil Service (retired), and Professor T. W. Rhys Davids have reaped the field so well that there is very little left for the gleaner to pick up in the way of new information. They, however, have been generous in placing the fruit of their labours at the service of the public. Mr. Smith's volume on Asoka, in the Rulers of India series, is the only monograph on the subject in the English language. So much new matter became available after the book was written, that the second edition, which appeared in 1909, although preserving the general plan of the first and without material emendation in the part that presented the legends regarding Asoka, was substantially a new work.

The modest volume on Buddhism, written as far back as 1878, by Professor Rhys Davids, for a series on the Non-Christian Religious Systems, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, still holds the field as the best handbook on the subject. Two other works by the same authors come next to those that have been mentioned, for the light they throw upon the India of the Maurya period. One of these is Mr. Smith's *Early History of India*, and the other is the volume on *Buddhist India*, by Professor Rhys Davids. Articles by the same writers on various cognate subjects in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* give us their most recent opinions and embody the results of some of the latest discoveries; the same work, as far as it has gone, contains many articles by other authorities that are of much interest to the student of the history of religion in India and the East. The historical volume (vol. ii) of the latest edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1908) also contains a useful summary, Mr. Vincent A. Smith being one of the principal contributors. For the information, however, regarding the interesting work of exploration on the site of the ancient Pataliputra, which is still in progress,

we are indebted to the Reports that have been published by the Archæological Survey of India. Other works that have been consulted will be referred to in the following pages.

I.

THE MAURYA EMPIRE

THE invasion of North-West India by Alexander the Great, which is the first definite landmark in Indian history and marks the beginning of intercourse between India and the West, may be taken as the starting point in the secular history of Asoka.

In May, 327 B.C., Alexander crossed the Hindu Kush with his army, and after spending about ten months fighting the mountain tribes, he entered India in February, 326. India was at that time divided into a large number of independent States, some large and some small, but none of them owing allegiance to any other as a paramount power. The task of the invader was made easier, as it was many years later in the days of Dupleix and Clive, through his aid being invoked on behalf of some of the warring kings and against the others. In May, 326 B.C., Alexander arrived at the Jhelum river, the Hydaspes of the Greek historians, and, stealing a march across it, fought a hard but successful battle against Porus, the Lion of the Panjab of that time. The Chenab, or Akesines, in full flood, was reached in July and crossed with difficulty. Then they came to the Ravi, or Hydraotes, which presented less difficulty. Three days' march further on was the Beas or Hyphasis river, which proved to be the limit of the Macedonian invasion. Owing to discontent among his troops, Alexander, to his great mortification, was compelled to abandon his design of conquering the rich territory that lay beyond. Not even the promise of all the wealth of Asia as their booty could induce the wearied soldiers to advance further. Retreating to the Jhelum, Alexander there built two thousand boats from the forest timber, and commenced his combined march and voyage to the sea. Eight thousand men were

in the boats, and one hundred and twenty thousand marched along the banks. Before turning his face towards the south, Alexander held a darbar of his officers and representatives of the local States. He had conquered in all seven distinct kingdoms, and Porus was placed at their head as the Viceroy of Alexander.

The voyage lasted ten months, and the sea was reached early in September, 325 B.C. Alexander then started to march overland to Persia, and lost most of his spoils of war in the desert of Gedrosia (Makran). Part of the army was sent by sea to the Persian Gulf.

Had Alexander lived, it is possible that he would have again invaded India with more adequate preparations for its conquest, and what the effect might have been on the course of Indian history is a matter of speculation; but his death at Babylon, in June, 323 B.C., a year after his return from India, at the early age of thirty-two, was followed by the break-up of his empire. The distant Indian provinces were made over to the officers and princes to whom they had been entrusted by Alexander. In several of them the former Indian rulers were allowed to resume their thrones, subject to a merely nominal recognition of the Macedonian as the sovereign power.

The premier State in the interior of India at that period was Magadha or South Bihar, located in Patna and the neighbouring districts, and ruled by what was known as the Nanda line of kings. The ruler at the time of Alexander's invasion of the Panjab was said to be the son of a barber who had become a paramour of the late queen and who, with her help, murdered the king. A youth, Chandragupta by name, was believed to be an illegitimate scion of this royal house. He seems in some way to have incurred the displeasure of the king and was compelled to flee for safety to the north-west, the scene of the Macedonian triumphs. We have the authority of Plutarch for the statement that Chandragupta visited the invaders' camp and actually met Alexander. The Nanda king of Magadha, Mahapadma by name, was unpopular, and the prospect of making an easy conquest of his kingdom was one of the reasons why Alexander was anxious to pursue his march to the further east. It was reserved for Chandragupta, however, to expel the

barber's son and to occupy his throne. With the help of a clever Brahman, Chanakya by name, as his minister, he challenged Mahapadma Nanda to battle, defeated him, and then murdered him and also his entire family. In his revolt Chandragupta had the assistance of one of the warrior chieftains whom he had met in the north, and who at first shared his throne. But he was soon disposed of, and Chandragupta reigned alone. His rule is believed to date from about the year 321 B.C., two years after the death of Alexander. He reigned for twenty-four years, from Pataliputra, the modern Patna, as his capital.

Chandragupta, known to the Greeks as Sandrokottos, was not content with the kingdom he had won, but took occasion by the hand to extend it to the north-west over the scene of Alexander's exploits. From the first the Indian provinces had been restive under Macedonian rule. Before Alexander had returned to Persia he heard that his Satrap, Philippus, had been murdered, and he was unable to do more than make temporary arrangements for a successor. With the help of the fierce fighting tribes of the north-west as his mercenaries, Chandragupta expelled the leaderless Macedonians and extended his own rule over north India and probably as far south as the Narbada river. Holding sway from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea, from the Himalayas to Ujjain, he became, in fact, the first Emperor of India.

It was not without a struggle, however, that Macedonia gave up her Eastern conquests. On the partition of territory that followed Alexander's death, Seleukos, surnamed Nikator, the Conqueror, established himself as Satrap of Babylon in 321 B.C. He had gained this position simply by the power of the sword, but in 315 he was expelled from Babylon by Antigonos, a successful rival, and sought safety in Egypt. Returning thence in 312 B.C., he recovered Babylon and set out upon a course of conquest which at first promised to revive the glories of Alexander. Nominally King of Syria, he was before long ruler of all western Asia, and in 305 B.C. he crossed the Indus. He found in Chandragupta a very formidable opponent. It is said that the King of Magadha was able to put 600,000 men on the field, and at some place

unknown one of the decisive battles of the world was fought, which rolled back for centuries the tide of Western conquest in India. Seleukos, Nikator no longer, was defeated and withdrew his forces from India. It was not, however, an ignominious flight, for terms of peace had first been drawn up between the two monarchs. The terms were certainly very much in favour of Chandragupta, who, by reason of the territory ceded to him by Seleukos, still further extended his kingdom to the Hindu Kush. The actual satrapies that were surrendered by Seleukos were those of Aria, Arachosia, Gedrosia, and Paropanisadae, and they may be said to correspond roughly with the present North-West Frontier Province of India, with Baluchistan and the greater part of Afghanistan. The Maurya Empire, thus enlarged, almost equalled in extent the British Empire of India. It was less extensive in the extreme south of the peninsula and in the far east and north-east, including neither Madras, nor Assam nor Burma; but it was much more extensive in the north-west. In exchange for territory which was sufficient in itself to make an empire, Seleukos received the paltry gift of five hundred elephants, and a matrimonial alliance was established between his house and that of Chandragupta.

Seleukos accepted his defeat as final, and, in token of his recognition of Chandragupta as a lawful sovereign, sent Megasthenes, some time not much later than 305 B.C., to be his ambassador at Pataliputra. Megasthenes became the father of Indian history. He had had some previous experience of the East, for he was by profession a soldier and he had served in the satrapy of Arachosia. During his residence at the court of Chandragupta he kept his ears and eyes open, and made a careful record of what he saw and heard, little dreaming how much future generations would be indebted to him for the information he bequeathed to them. What he wrote has, in its original form, been lost, but much of it has been preserved in the works of Greek and Latin writers—Arrian, Q. Curtius, Plutarch, Justin, Pliny, Strabo, Appian, and Athenaios. Some years ago the late Mr. McCrindle, who was principal of Patna College, performed a very useful work in collecting all the passages from these writers that could be traced to Megasthenes and embodying them in books descriptive of ancient India and

of its invasion by Alexander. Until quite recently, Megasthenes stood almost alone as an authority on the Maurya Empire, but the excavations that are being carried on at the site of Pataliputra are confirming in a remarkable way the assertions of the old Greek writer. Much of what he tells us of the strength and splendour of the empire might seem incredible, if it were not verified by actual demonstration. A famous ancient work on *Artha-sastra*, politics, ascribed to Chanakya, which was long lost, has recently been recovered. Unfortunately, the date of the work is uncertain; so that it is impossible to take it as certainly representing the statecraft of Chandragupta's days.

Megasthenes describes Pataliputra, which stood on the northern bank of the Son river, near its junction with the Ganges—as revealed by the excavators, it was situated just outside the southern municipal boundaries of the modern city of Patna—as a magnificent city, well fortified, and in every way worthy to be the capital of a great kingdom. He estimated that the royal camp contained 400,000 persons, and he tells us that Chandragupta's standing army included 600,000 infantry, 300,000 cavalry, 9,000 elephants and a multitude of chariots. For purposes of comparison the reader may be reminded that the entire British army in India at the present day consists in all of about 232,000 troops, of which about two-thirds are Indian and one-third European. This great army was not the creation of Chandragupta; he inherited it, or won it by conquest, from the Nanda monarch whom he displaced. Plutarch's phrase is that with this huge and well-equipped army Chandragupta "overran and subdued the whole of India," and we have seen that there is reason to believe that this is true, if we except from "India" the extreme south and the far east. There is a tradition that before the end of his life Chandragupta abdicated the throne and adopted the life of a Jain ascetic, but its historicity is doubtful.

He was succeeded by his son, Bindusara, otherwise known as Amitraghatta, the Slayer of Foes, who reigned for twenty-five or twenty-eight years. Dwarfed between his distinguished father and his still more famous son, Bindusara fills a comparatively insignificant place in

history, but it is to his credit that he not only kept intact the great empire his sire had won, and bequeathed it unimpaired to his successor, but is said to have actually enlarged it towards the south. He maintained friendly relations with the King of Syria, who sent Deimachos to take the place which Megasthenes had held in the days of Chandragupta. When Seleukos was murdered in 280 B.C., he was succeeded by his son, Antiochos Soter, who continued to correspond with Bindusara. There is a story that Bindusara asked Antiochos to send him some figs and raisin wine, and added that he would also be obliged if he would buy a professor for him and send him to Pataliputra. Antiochos replied that he had much pleasure in sending the figs and raisin wine, but regretted that he could not comply with the last request, as it was not lawful for Greeks to sell a professor.

Ptolemy Philadelphus, who was at that time King of Egypt (285-247 B.C.), sent Dionysios on a mission to India, and it is possible that he also visited Pataliputra ; it is impossible to say, however, whether his visit took place in the time of Bindusara or after his death. He, too, like Megasthenes, wrote an account of his experiences, which was still available to Pliny in the first century A.D. Still another Greek who visited India was an officer, Patrokles by name, who had served under Seleukos Antiochos. He made voyages to India and collected information about the people and country.

In the year 272 or 273 B.C., Bindusara died, and was succeeded by his son Asoka, the third and the greatest of the Maurya line of kings.

II.

ASOKA, THE MONARCH

Of the early life of Asoka-vardhana[1] we have very little authentic information. There are many traditions about his youthful days, some of which are quite consistent with the facts which we do know regarding the man and the times in which he lived, while others are not only without confirmation but are inherently improbable. In the former class we may place the report that as a prince he held the appointment of Viceroy, first at Taxila and afterwards at Ujjain. We know that it was the custom to appoint princes of the royal blood to both of these important positions. Taxila is the name given by the Greek historians to what was at the time of the Macedonian invasion a rich and flourishing city. It was the capital of a kingdom which yielded to Alexander. It was an emporium of trade with Central Asia, and a great seat of Hindu learning: Panini, the great grammarian, taught there, perhaps fifty years before Alexander's time. Its ruins correspond to the modern village of Shahdheri in the tahsil of Rawalpindi. In recent days it has been the scene of important excavations by the Archæological Survey, which have thrown much light on the early history of India, including the development of Indian art and the spread of Buddhism. Most of the discoveries, however, seem to belong to a period later than that of Asoka. Early in the Christian era Taxila was a place of Buddhist pilgrimage, and was held in great sanctity as the scene of the Buddha's sacrifice of his head. After that it disappears from history, until it is unearthed by the twentieth-century pick and shovel. One account says that Prince Asoka won

[1] *Asoka* means 'sorrowlessness,' 'joy'; *vardhana* means 'increasing.'

his spurs by conquering Taxila, and that from it as a centre he ruled over the Panjab.

Ujjain, the other place associated with the young Asoka, is a town not only of ancient fame but also of present-day importance. It was known among men of the olden time as Avanti. It is situated in the centre of Malwa, of which it is the traditional capital, in the State of Gwalior. It is one of the seven sacred cities of India, and orthodox Hindus believe that it has existed from time immemorial. It is also to the Hindu geographer what Greenwich is to the British—the first meridian of longitude. At the time of Asoka, Ujjain was a great commercial centre; and he was sent there to govern as Viceroy the western provinces of the Maurya empire.

It has been regarded as a well-established fact that Asoka ascended the throne of his father and grandfather in the year 273 B.C., but some authorities make the date 272 B.C. He reigned about forty years. Little credence is now given to the story that he "waded to the throne through a sea of blood," murdering ninety-nine of his brothers and sparing only one. There was no doubt a tendency among Buddhist chroniclers of his life to paint his character as black as possible in the days before his conversion, so that he should appeal all the more powerfully to the world as a miracle of grace. The story is refuted by references contained in the edicts to the brothers of the king, who were still living, many years after his accession, and who, along with their sister, held a place in the affections of the king. The only fact that suggests that Asoka did not gain the throne without a struggle is the long delay that took place before his final coronation. The solemn consecration by the rite of aspersion (*abhisheka*) was not performed till the year 269 B.C., four years after the beginning of the reign; but there is no authentic record of bloodshed. All the available evidence goes to show that the kingdom which had grown to imperial dimensions under Chandragupta had become firmly established, and held undisputed sway over a very wide area, before it was inherited by his grandson. The circumstances in which the grandfather acquired power and the very humble or even ignominious origin of the family, make it probable that there were rivals even in the days of the grandson who

never became reconciled to the rule of the Mauryas; their discontent may have led them to attempt to prevent Asoka from ascending the throne, but history gives us no information. It may be noted that Asoka himself counts his "regnal years" from the date of his consecration. The royal titles which he assumed were *devanam piya*, "dear to the gods," and *piyadasi*, "of gracious mien." The use of these titles has been quoted as a proof that Buddhism was not atheistical, but it is hardly necessary to point out that Asoka adopted them before his conversion to Buddhism, and that once a name has been chosen it is difficult to get rid of it. Many good Christians in India to-day retain Hindu names. *Les Inscriptions de Piyadasi* is the title of one of the most important works on the subject of Asoka. It is by a French scholar, M. Emile Senart, and was published in 1881 and re-published in 1886.

There is very little that is known with certainty regarding the first thirteen years of the reign of Asoka. The monkish legends of Ceylon, as has already been mentioned, represent him at this period of his life as a monster of wickedness. One day, in a transport of rage, he beheads with his own hand five hundred of his ministers by the sword. Another day he causes five hundred women who had displeased him to be burnt alive. The story is that the women had mocked the king by breaking off the leaves of an *asoka* tree in the palace garden, and it furnishes an opportunity for mentioning that "asoka," which means "without sorrow," is the name of a tree, the *Saraca indica*, one of the many trees held sacred by the Hindus, this one being dedicated to or associated with Kama, the god of love.

The fact is that we know very little about Asoka personally except what he has told us himself, and he would seem to have regarded the period of his life previous to his conversion as a blank. It is probable that he lived the ordinary life of a Hindu monarch, and that it was not the kind of life which a saint would look back upon with any feeling of satisfaction. He is said to have been specially devoted to the cult of Siva, a cult that is not characterised by strict asceticism. He is said to have fed 60,000 Brahmans daily, as his father and grandfather had done before him.

He had no scruples about destroying life in the hunting field, or eating animal flesh, or drinking wine.

Megasthenes gives us many interesting details about the internal administration of the empire in the days of Chandragupta, and we may assume that the description holds good of at least the earlier years of the reign of Asoka.

Pataliputra, the capital, was governed by a commission of thirty, divided into six boards of five members each. The first board took charge of the industrial arts, artisans being regarded as servants of the State; the second board performed on behalf of foreigners the services which in a modern State are rendered by the consuls appointed by their own governments—attending to them in sickness, burying them when dead, and administering their estates. The third board maintained a register of births and deaths, for revenue and other purposes. The fourth exercised a general supervision over trade and commerce, and regulated weights and measures—a Board of Trade. Everything for sale was marked with an official stamp, a tax on sales being an important source of public revenue. A fifth board regulated the sale of manufactured goods, indigenous or imported. The sixth board collected the tax on sales, which, says Megasthenes, amounted to ten per cent. *ad valorem.* Evasion of taxation, like theft, was punishable by mutilation or death.

The court was maintained with the luxury and extravagance characteristic of Eastern potentates. Not only the king, but his courtesans as well were carried in palankins of gold, and in royal processions the equipment of these women was as sumptuous as that of the queen. Female archers, as well as the courtesans, were in constant attendance on the monarch, and their special duty in the royal hunts was to prevent the public from trespassing on the route marked out for the king. The course was marked out by ropes, and it was a capital crime for anyone to pass this barrier without permission. A curious form of racing, with mixed teams of horses and bullocks harnessed to a car, was a peculiar item in the programme of court amusements, and betting on the results was much indulged in. There were fights between elephants, rhinoceroses, bulls, rams, etc.

It is hardly possible that the outlying parts of the empire were governed with the same efficiency and attention to detail, but they were not neglected. It is said that a road, a thousand miles long, connected Pataliputra with Taxila. It would be interesting to know more about this road, which probably followed very much the same route as the Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta to Peshawar, which is one of the monuments which Lord Dalhousie, the great pro-consul, left behind him in India. Sir John Strachey makes the sweeping statement that "no Indian prince ever made a road,"[1] but in the rural districts of India a distinction is recognized between roads that are "made roads" and roads that are not. Probably Asoka's roads belonged to the latter class, cart tracks marked out, perhaps, by a line of trees, useful enough in the dry season, and distinguished in the rains by the mud being softer and deeper than elsewhere. There were also waterways as well as roads to serve as means of communication. The custom of appointing princes as viceroys has been referred to. There was also an organised body of officials, civil service men, of various grades, *Mahamatras* and *Yuktas*. An anticipation of the plan which has been adopted to a limited extent in special areas by the British rulers of India was the recognition and utilization of the petty chiefs of the jungle tribes for purposes of administration, subject always to the supreme power. There may have been "Protected States," as in modern India, but the evidence is scanty. There is only a single reference in one of the inscriptions, the Girnar inscription, to a chief who held a position of this kind, of semi-independence. The rule was entirely autocratic, direct and personal in the home provinces, which are distinguished, as we shall afterwards see, by the pillar inscriptions, and by deputy in the more distant regions whose extent is indicated by the rock inscriptions.

There was a highly organized Irrigation Department, the charge for the water supplied varying from one-fourth to one-third of the produce of the land that it rendered fertile.[2] The

[1] *India*, chap. XIV.

[2] From 6 to 12 per cent. is the rate charged by the Government of India.

land tax was the main source of revenue, as it still is and always has been in India. All the land was nationalized, and the State took one-fourth to one-sixth as its share of the profits of agriculture. This would be regarded to-day as extremely oppressive. There was a land settlement under Akbar, carried out by Todar Mal, of which particulars have been preserved. Under it thirty-three per cent. of the produce of the land was claimed as the minimum of tribute to be paid to the State, but in actual practice this minimum was usually exceeded. Under the Bengal landowners the proportion that was taken is said to have been fifty-four per cent., and under the Sikh rulers in the Panjab it was forty per cent. Under British rule it varies from three to eight per cent. In the affairs of the realm in the days of the Mauryas, the king attended personally to every detail, and was always accessible to his subjects, except on such occasions as the royal hunts. If low taxation is the main secret of successful rule among Oriental races, it is remarkable, not that dynasties changed so frequently in ancient India, but that they lived so long. There were cruel laws and barbaric punishments, and there must have been a great deal of oppression and corruption. The large size of the army is in itself a proof that repressive measures and a strong hand were necessary to maintain the throne.

This army was under a War Office consisting of thirty members. There were six departments. The first was the Admiralty, which had charge of sea-going as well as of river ships. The second dealt with Transport, the third with Infantry, the fourth with Cavalry, the fifth with War Chariots, and the sixth with Elephants. The chariots were drawn by two or four horses, harnessed abreast, but when the army was on the march bullocks were used, in order to keep the horses fresh. Each chariot carried two fighting men in addition to the driver. Great importance was attached to the elephants as beasts of battle. Each of them carried three fighting men in addition to the driver. The infantry carried bows and arrows, the bow being equal in height to the man who used it, and the arrows had shafts three yards long. They were formidable weapons, said to be irresistible. The soldier carried a buckler of undressed ox-hide (the cow cannot have been held very sacred in those days). Some of

the infantry carried javelins instead of bows, and all had swords, broad in the blade but not more than three cubits long. The troops as a rule tried to avoid a close encounter with the enemy, placing the greatest reliance on their bows and arrows, but when they came to a hand-to-hand fight they wielded their swords lustily with both hands. In using the bow, they rested one end on the ground and pressed it with the left foot as they drew the string backwards, discharging the arrow. The cavalry rode without saddles, and carried two lances and a short buckler. The reins were attached to an iron prong in the horse's mouth and to this was fixed a circular piece of ox-hide studded with pricks of brass or iron pointing inwards, which fitted round the horse's mouth. These details are furnished by Arrian, after Megasthenes, and they correspond with a nearly life-sized figure of a soldier which was discovered not very long ago at the *Stupa* of Bharhut.

Asoka's capital at Pataliputra, as he found it, was defended by a massive timber palisade, with sixty-four gates and five hundred and seventy towers, and a moat outside. He strengthened these defences by adding an outer wall of masonry, and he also enriched the city by the addition of several stone buildings. Recent excavations, still in progress, have literally shed the light of day upon this ancient city that had been buried for many centuries, and form one of the most interesting chapters in the history of archæological research in India,

Some antiquarians feared that the site of Pataliputra had been entirely washed away by the Ganges. Others were more confident that the ruins would be found beneath the village of Kumrahar, to the south of the modern city of Patna. In the early nineties, Colonel Waddell, an officer of the Indian Medical Service who has made a careful study of Buddhism, put this theory to the proof by digging up several fragments of polished stone which beyond doubt had belonged to an Asokan-column. The question had to be considered whether these fragments were parts of some palatial building. The prospect that was held out, of explorations on a grand scale to settle this point and many others, was very attractive; it was only the lack of means that prevented the Archæological Survey of the Government of

India from undertaking operations on the extensive scale that would be necessary if the work was to be done in a thoroughgoing and satisfactory way. This difficulty was overcome by the generous offer of a public-spirited Parsi gentlemen of Bombay, Mr. Ratan Tata, to pay Rs. 20,000 a year, without any definite limit of time, for the systematic excavation of some buried site in India. It was at once recognized that Pataliputra had the first claim, and work was begun at Kumrahar in January, 1913, under the direction of Dr. D. B. Spooner, the Superintendent of the Eastern Circle, Archæological Survey of India.

It soon became evident that the excavators were on the right spot and that they had struck an antiquarian deposit of extraordinary interest. The work had not proceeded far before it was proved that the fragments recovered by Colonel Waddell were not those of a solitary column, but of a large group of columns arranged in regular rows. These columns were polished monoliths, some three feet six inches in diameter at the base and not less than twenty feet in height. They were made of Chunar sandstone. So the ruins were evidently those of a magnificent pillared hall, part of the palace of Asoka. The pillars were in parallel rows, each pillar and each row fifteen feet apart, the alignment being east and west. Before the first season's work was finished—for the excavations had to be suspended during the rainy season—ten rows of eight columns each had been located. There was evidence that the building had been even more extensive. It would seem that the floor of this building, now seventeen feet below the surface, was of wood. Above this floor is a stratum of soil, eight or ten feet deep, and above this, again, a layer of ashes, in which lie the broken fragments of the columns. At the site of each column there is a tubular shaft of ashes, descending through the soil to the level of the floor. Dr. Spooner's explanation is that at some point of time that cannot be determined with accuracy, but which he puts down provisionally as early in the Gupta epoch,[1] the building was flooded, and the flood continued sufficiently long to deposit eight or nine feet of silt on the level of the floor.

[1] The Gupta Dynasty lasted from 320 to 480 A.D.

While this silt was being deposited, one of the columns, its foundations having been weakened by the flood, toppled over, but the others remained erect. There is reason to believe that the palace continued to be used after the floods had subsided, the top level of the silt serving as a floor. Then fire completed the work of demolition which had been begun by the flood, perhaps about the fifth century A.D. The fire destroyed the superstructure of the building, which had evidently been of timber, heavy logs of *sal* wood, resting directly on the columns without the intervention of stone capitals. These beams were fixed to the stone columns by heavy round bars or bolts of metal, presumably copper, which penetrated the shafts to the depth of nearly one foot. When the fire took place, the great heat caused these metal bolts to expand, splitting the top portions of the columns into innumerable fragments. The lower portions of the columns were preserved by the silt. As a result of the fire a large deposit of ashes was left, covering the lower deposit of silt. The scene presented must have been that of a field of ashes, with stumps of stone columns projecting like the tree trunks in a forest that had been swept by fire. Gradually the wooden floor, beneath the silt, decayed, and, as it decayed, subsided. This led to the slow subsidence of the pillars, and each pillar in its retreat was followed by ash. The result is that the excavators have been able, by removing the earth to a level just below the stratum of ash, to map out the ground plan of the building as marked by the pillars.

The plan so marked out reveals a building that bears a strong resemblance to the famous Hall of One Hundred Pillars at Persepolis, and an indication that Asoka not only followed Persepolitan principles in architecture, but actually imported Persepolitan workmen, is found in a peculiar mason's mark which has been deciphered on the fragments, and which is remarkably like the mark on the same kind that is to be found on ancient Persian stone work.

All this is plain sailing, at least when we have an expert pilot as our guide. An element of mystery has been added to the story by the discovery of seven wooden platforms to the south of the pillared hall. Each measures thirty feet long, six feet broad and four and a half feet high. They lie parallel to one another at varying distances,

their long measurement being east and west. They are composed of *sal* wood, the timber of which the forests that once covered Bihar were largely composed, in a wonderful state of preservation. Various explanations have been offered as to the purpose which these platforms originally served. One that was firmly believed by the people of the locality was that they were the treasure chests of the Maurya emperors. This idea was so prevalent that it was deemed expedient to disprove it by opening up one of the platforms. It proved to be solid throughout. Another popular theory is that the platforms were landing stages for pleasure barges in some Venetian garden of the emperors, and the picture of Asoka being rowed about in a gondola on the cool waters of an artificial lake, on a hot summer evening, is a very pleasing one. Unfortunately, it is entirely imaginary. Dr. Spooner thinks that the most probable explanation is that these singular structures were merely the foundations for one, or more probably two, specially large and heavy columns each. He says, however, that the question at present is wholly undetermined, and will probably remain so until the excavations have been carried out to a further stage.

Coins, seals, fragments of pottery and other relics have also been found, but most of them belong to a later date than Asoka's reign. After the final destruction of the palace by fire, the site seems to have been abandoned till the Muhammadan times. In April, 1912, Patna became the capital of the new province of Bihar, Chota Nagpur and Orissa.

The Asokan palace, as we have just seen, furnishes strong evidence of Persepolitan influence, and it has been suggested that the entire idea of the great military empire founded by Chandragupta, which reached the height of its glory in the days of Asoka, was borrowed from the same source. The Maurya Empire, says Sir William Holderness,[1] very likely took the Persian as its model. The latter, till overthrown by Alexander, dominated all men's minds by its magnitude. Its elaborated and highly concentrated system

[1] *The People and Problems of India*, in the Home University Library.

was the last word of the East on the art of government. It rested on three principles—the kingly power, with a military force at his command ; a host of trained civil officials ; and strict control from the centre. If it erred on the side of centralisation, it may be replied that the East has never understood anything but centralisation in government. The danger in such a system, that weakness or corruption at the centre means weakness and corruption everywhere, was certainly exemplified in the later stages of the history of the Maurya empire.

In the year 261 B.C. an event occurred which had a profound effect, not only upon Asoka personally, but upon the subsequent history of the Eastern world. Kalinga, or the Kalingas or the Three Kalingas, is a region on the east coast of India, lying between the Eastern Ghats and the sea, with the Godavari River as its southern and the Mahanadi as its northern boundary, and it includes the famous temple of Jaganath at Puri. When Asoka ascended the throne it was an independent kingdom, and it is probable that he regarded its conquest as necessary to round off the territory which his father had acquired towards the south. So he waged war on Kalinga, and conquered it.

In spite of the large forces at his command, Asoka must have found it a hard task to overcome the people who fought to retain their independence. According to his own statement, 150,000 were carried away as captives, 100,000 were slain, and many times that number perished, whether by disease or starvation he does not say. It was directly after the annexation of Kalinga that the Emperor espoused the cause of Buddhism and began to exert his power and influence to propagate it. He himself attributes his conversion directly to the feelings of remorse on account of all the suffering and loss of life which his conquest had entailed, and he declares that it would henceforth be a matter of profound sorrow and regret to him if he were to be the cause of a hundredth or even a thousandth part of those who had perished or been taken prisoners being subjected to the same fate.

The conversion of Asoka is not merely a biographical fact of great significance. It reacted in many ways upon his policy and administration; and it led directly to the

writing and publication of his great edicts, which, inscribed on rocks and pillars in many parts of his dominions, served in the first instance to inform his subjects about his faith, his life and his purposes, and have now revealed to modern men one of the most remarkable personalities of the ancient world.

It is not easy to understand why Asoka, the head of a great military empire that had been acquired in no very remote time by conquest, should have been so deeply affected and conscience-stricken by his experience of what were in those days the familiar horrors of war. There must surely have been some preparation for so great a change. Possibly the teaching of the followers of Gautama had impressed him more than he had himself realised, and the experience of actual bloodshed on a large scale, merely to gratify ambition and enrich the State, served to crystallize into convictions impressions that had been slowly forming in his mind.

In any case, in order to understand the significance of Asoka's declaration of his devotion to the Law of Piety or the Law of Duty (*Dhamma* in Prakrit, *Dharma* in Sanskrit), to the love and protection and propagation of that Law, it is necessary to retrace our steps in order to refer very briefly to the origin and spread of Buddhism.

III.

EARLY BUDDHISM

About six hundred years before the Christian era, an Aryan tribe called the Sakyas, who belonged to the Kshatriya or warrior caste of Hindus, had settled in that part of north India which is now known as the Nepal *tarai*, near the foot of the Himalayas. The capital of their small State was Kapilavastu, which is said to have been situated on the banks of the Rohini (now the Kohana) river. It has not been possible to identify the site of this city with accuracy, but it is said to have been about a hundred miles north-east of the holy city of Benares and about forty miles south of the hills. The Sakyas were an independent tribe, organized as a republic in which the nobles held the place and the title of Raja in rotation; and they had forged ahead to the East with more enterprise than most of their fellow-Aryans; but the neighbourhood of powerful kingdoms like Magadha and its rival Kosala, and of the rude Mongolian hill tribes to the north, made their existence, or at least their independence, somewhat precarious. One of the nobles of the Sakya tribe was named Suddhodana. Buddhist tradition makes him an independent monarch of great power and wealth.

The nearest neighbours of the Sakyas, on the other side of the Rohini River, were the Koliyans, a tribe kindred to themselves and probably exposed to the same dangers. At this time the two tribes were at peace with each other, and Suddhodana, Raja for the time being of the Sakyas, had taken unto himself as wives the two daughters of the Raja of the Koliyans, an arrangement which was no doubt to the mutual advantage of the kingdoms. For years both wives were childless, but there were great rejoicings among the people when it was announced that the elder, now about forty-five years old, was to become a mother, and, it was fervently

hoped, furnish the State with a prince and heir. The expectant mother, in accordance with custom, left her husband's house in order that the confinement might take place at the home of her parents; but in the course of the journey her child, the future Buddha, was born unexpectedly under the shade of some lofty satin trees in a pleasant grove called Lumbini. There is no need to recount all the wonderful legends that in later years gathered round the story of the birth of Buddha, but we can easily believe that locally the event was hailed with great joy.

> "The King gave order that his town should keep
> High festival; therefore the ways were swept,
> Rose-odours sprinkled in the street, the trees
> Were hung with lamps and flags, while merry crowds
> Gaped on the sword-players and posturers,
> The jugglers, charmers, swingers, rope-walkers,
> The nautch-girls in their spangled skirts, and bells
> That chime light laughter round their restless feet;
> The masquers wrapped in skins of bear and deer,
> The tiger-tamers, wrestlers, quail-fighters,
> Beaters of drum and twanglers of the wire,
> Who made the people happy by command.
> Moreover, from afar came merchant-men,
> Bringing, on tidings of his birth, rich gifts
> In golden trays; goat-shawls, and nard, and jade,
> Turkisses, 'evening-sky' tint, woven webs—
> So fine twelve folds hid not a modest face—
> Waist-cloths sewn thick with pearls, and sandal-wood;
> Their prince Savarthasiddh, 'All-Prospering,'
> Briefer, Siddartha."[1]

The joy was soon to be mingled with sorrow. Mother and child were carried back to Kapilavastu, but seven days later the mother, Queen Maya, died, and her sister, the Raja's second wife, undertook the care of the child who was at once her nephew and her step-son.

The fact that the little prince was named Siddhartha, "All-Prospering," or "He who has accomplished his aim," is quoted as a proof that even in his earliest years he was endowed with unusual gifts. The name, however, may have been an afterthought, or this interpretation of it may be an afterthought, for similar names are very common among commonplace children in India to-day. The name by which the

[1] Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia.*

prince became known to the world was Gautama, the name of the clan to which his family belonged. The many other titles which he bore were honorific or descriptive. One of the most familiar of them—Sakyamuni—just means the Sakya sage. Another of his names was Sakyasinha, "Lion of the tribe of Sakya." Buddha, or the Buddha, means "the Enlightened One," and it does not belong to him exclusively.

Early in life the young prince was married to his cousin, Yasodhara by name, the daughter of the Raja of Koli. Among his followers she is usually called Rahulamata, the Mother of Rahula, who was their only child.

It was not till he had reached his twenty-ninth year that Gautama resolved, with dramatic suddenness, to abandon the palace for the jungle, and the life of a nobleman for that of the religious devotee. The well-known story tells how the youth had been most carefully sheltered from all experiences that would cause distress to mind or body, but how one day an accidental encounter with an emaciated old man suddenly revealed to his mind the vanity of human life. Another version, more favoured by Buddhist authorities, is that the change in Gautama's outlook on life was brought about by a fourfold vision of an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a dignified hermit or holy man. This vision appeared only to Gautama and his charioteer, Channa, and the latter was inspired to act as interpreter to his master. It is highly improbable that a noble who had reached the age of maturity could have remained so long a stranger to the realities of life and death, in childlike ignorance of what was going on in the world around him. We may regard the legend as a poetic expression of the fact that the mind of the young man had become profoundly affected by the thought of the insignificance and worthlessness of all material things, compared with the realities of the spiritual and eternal world. The story goes that the birth of his son, Rahula, precipitated the crisis. (According to Sir Edwin Arnold, he fled before the child was born.) It served not as a link to tie him to the conventional, but as a goad to drive him forth to the desert. He was in a garden by the river-side when the birth was announced to him. He only said quietly, "This is a new and strong tie which I shall have to break." He returned

home to find all Kapilavastu rejoicing over the birth of the King's first grandson, but to the man who, as he believed, had caught a glimpse of a vision of the highest, even the songs of joy suggested a meaning that no one but himself thought of. Thus Gautama heard a girl, his cousin, singing a stanza, "Happy the father, happy the mother, happy the wife, of such a son and husband." The word used for "happy" was capable of a double meaning; it was, in fact, an adjective formed from the word which the Buddha has made familiar to the world in the Sanskrit "nirvāna," and thus meant, "Freed from the fetters of existence, from the wheel of transmigration." Taking off his necklace of pearls, Gautama gave it to the bewildered girl, saying, "Let this be her fee as a teacher."

The same night, at midnight, Gautama went to the door of his wife's chamber, and, without disturbing them, took a farewell look at the child and his mother, restraining his strong desire to take his son for the last time into his arms through fear that in doing so he might waken Yasodhara, and that she might prevail with him to abandon his purpose. Accompanied only by Channa, he rode off into the darkness, so making the Great Renunciation. In the morning, one version of the story tells us, he took off his ornaments and sent them back to his father along with the horse he had ridden, by the hand of Channa. Now that he was free he had no desire to conceal his object. He then cut off his long hair, exchanged clothes with a poor passerby, and turned his face, a pilgrim of the Unseen, homeless and penniless, to Rajagriha, the capital of King Bimbisara. The sannyasi was even in those days a familiar enough figure in India. Although they had renounced the world, these ascetics often had an eye for the picturesque in choosing their habitations, and they appreciated the benefits of a pleasant climate. An outlying spur of the Vindhya Hills, the most northerly part of the range, is found in the district where Bimbisara once held sway—his capital Rajagriha has been identified with the ruined town of Rajgir in Patna district—and in the caves of a beautiful valley among these hills there dwelt a number of these holy men. Their fame had travelled as far as Kapilavastu, and Gautama turned his steps in their direction, hoping to obtain

from them the satisfaction he sought. From one or another of them he probably learned all that Hindu philosophy had to teach him. One of their favourite doctrines was the efficacy of penance, of bodily mortification, as a means of gaining superhuman power and insight. Gautama determined to give this theory a fair trial, and, retiring with five disciples into the jungles of Uruvela, near Buddh-Gaya, for six years he practised austerities of so severe a character that he was reduced to a shadow. His fame as an ascetic spread far and wide, but he failed to find the spiritual peace he longed for; his bodily sufferings seemed rather to aggravate the sorrows of his mind. This, too, was vanity and vexation of spirit, a striving after wind. One day he fainted, and on recovering resolved to give up self-mortification and to take regular food. This was a great disappointment to his disciples, who left him alone, and went off to Benares. One day he wandered to the banks of the Nairanjara river, received his morning meal from the hands of a village maiden, Sujata by name, and sat down under the shade of a *pipal* tree. The *pipal* tree, *Ficus religiosa*, first cousin of the banyan, *Ficus Bengalensis*, is sacred to the Hindus, but this particular Bo-Tree, or Tree of Wisdom, under which the weary Gautama sat, became as sacred a symbol to his followers as the Cross is to the Christian. After he had eaten his scanty meal, Gautama remained the whole day in contemplation. It was there and then that he became Buddha, the Enlightened One, and that at least the outline of the faith he was to preach dawned upon his mind. Salvation by self-control and love, the Middle Path, avoiding indulgence as coarse and degrading on the one hand and self-mortification as painful and useless on the other, this was the germ of his doctrine. The Middle Path was summed up in eight principles, Right Belief, Right Feelings, Right Speech, Right Actions, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Endeavour, Right Memory, and Right Meditation—against which, as St. Paul would say, there is no law. This Middle Path was necessary on account of four fundamental truths: First, the suffering that is inseparable from individual existence and consciousness; second, the cause of that suffering, desire, the lust of life; third, the cessation of

sorrow through the cessation of desire; fourth, the Noble Eightfold Path of the virtuous life. It is this inward culture, the way of self-control, and love, that gives the victory over desire and sorrow. These truths Gautama professed to have learned, not from the Vedas or from any human teachers, but solely by the light of reason and intuition.

He at once sought to communicate to others the secret he had learned while under the *pipal* tree, and naturally he expected to find most sympathy and appreciation among his former disciples. He went to Benares in search of them, and finding them in the Deer Park, three miles north of the city, preached his first-sermon to them; and they became his first converts. The place is almost as sacred to Buddhists as the Bo-Tree itself. A great monastery arose in the Deer Park, and wealthy Buddhists at various times gave money to erect buildings for it. Among the most munificent donors was Asoka.[1]

Gautama does not appear at any time to have set himself in opposition to Hinduism. He was born, brought up, lived and died a Hindu, says Rhys Davids. Nor did the Hindus outcaste him, although they regarded him as in some ways heterodox and a teacher of dangerous tendencies. Brahmans who became his disciples continued to be Brahmans. Still, from the first Gautama's propaganda was, in many respects, in striking contrast to Hinduism. One of its most prominent features was its missionary zeal; it proclaimed a way of salvation which was open to all mankind, without distinction of class or rank or creed or even of sex. Asoka, the most distinguished of all its missionaries, was, as we have seen, a man who did not make the remotest claim to priestly birth. Women were among the earliest disciples of the Buddha, and it was not long before he, somewhat unwillingly, it is said, founded an order of female mendicants. Within the order of Buddhist monks, known as bhikkhus, beggars, or Sramanas, men of penance, caste disappeared, as among Hindu and Jain Sannyasis. Early in the history of the crusade, there were movements in favour of a stricter discipline regarding habits of living;

[1] See below p. 56.

that only cast-off rags should be worn as clothing, and that no meat should be eaten. Gautama did not forbid the observance of rules like these, but he regarded them as unnecessary and even as a possible hindrance to devout souls. Nirvāna did not depend upon things like these, nor upon any outward performances. It is a proof of the evasive and elusive nature of Hinduism that it was so long in discovering the incompatibility between itself and Buddhism.

For about forty-five years after his enlightenment Gautama devoted himself to the proclamation of the faith, making long preaching tours himself during the fair months of the year, and sending out disciples in large numbers. During the four rainy months, from June till October, remaining in one place he taught his followers. King Bimbisara, whose capital, Rajagriha, continued to be one of Gautama's favourite resorts, became a convert, probably the first of royal rank. It is said that Gautama re-visited Kapilavastu and won both his wife and his son to the faith.

On his last journey, at a place called Pava, Gautama was entertained by a goldsmith, Chunda by name, who prepared for him a meal of rice and young pork. This, it is said, was the cause of his death, and it is not a story any of his followers were likely to invent. The same afternoon he started for Kusinagara, a place 120 miles north-east of Benares and 80 miles due east of Kapilavastu, and on reaching it he took up his abode in a grove outside the town. He died there that night, discoursing about religion to the very end with those around him. He was eighty years of age. Ananda, his cousin, a faithful companion and latterly the most intimate of his associates, was with him at the last, and he and the others were earnestly urged by the Master to adhere to the Law and to the rules of the Order after he had left them, and to "work out their salvation with diligence."

For many years authorities differed seriously as to the date of Buddha's death, and even now the exact year cannot be fixed with certainty. But it has become quite clear that it occurred between 483 and 477 B.C. Future discoveries may enable scholars to settle the time more definitely, but

for the present we must content ourselves with the statement that if we put his birth in 560 B.C. and his death in 480 B.C., we are not more than three years wrong.

The story of Gautama as it has been told in these pages may be accepted as being at least founded on fact. He himself, like the Greatest of all teachers, left no written record; but the authoritative books of the religion took final shape at a very early date, at the time of the Council which Asoka assembled at Pataliputra about 250 B.C. The ease with which the historical events in the life of Gautama, the recorded facts that are inherently credible and consistent with our knowledge of the times and of the land in which he lived, can be distinguished from the myths and legends favours the belief that Gautama was a real person.

It would be beyond our province to trace the subsequent history of Buddhism, but it is desirable that we should have some idea of the main elements in the system of which Asoka became so earnest and successful an exponent. What does Asoka really mean when he declares his devotion to the Law of Piety?

The two cardinal doctrines of Buddhism, as preached by Gautama and accepted by Asoka, are Karma and Nirvāna. Karma is the attempt to solve the problem which has puzzled so many thoughtful minds ever since men began to reflect on the facts of human life,—the problem of suffering, the inequalities of our human lot, the prosperity of the wicked, the sorrows of the righteous, both alike unmerited and unjust. Buddha does not console himself with the thought of a better world hereafter in which all these wrongs will be redressed, where the wicked will be punished and the righteous rewarded. He finds the explanation in the past—not in an unmoral, inexorable Fate, nor in a Divine purpose working out its gracious ends in ways that are at present mysterious but will one day become plain—but in Karma, the doctrine that as soon as a conscious being dies a new being is produced, in a higher or a lower state of happiness according to the merit or demerit of the being who died. This idea is in harmony with the Hindu theory of transmigration or metemphsychosis, but it must be distinguished from the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul. To the Buddhist there is no soul, no ego, no individuality

or personality. Man is never the same for two consecutive moments. There is within him no abiding principle whatever. He consists of a concourse (1) of material qualities, earth, water, fire, air; the five organs of sense; the five attributes of matter—form, sound, smell, taste, substance; the two distinctions of sex; the three essential conditions of thought, vitality and space; the two means of communication, gesture and speech; and the seven qualities of living bodies—bouyancy, elasticity, power of adaptation, power of aggregation, duration, change, decay; (2) of the sensations; (3) of abstract ideas; (4) of tendencies or potentialities of mind, Sankhārā, elaborately classified in fifty-two divisions; and (5) of thought or reason. These five *skandhas* or aggregates are constantly changing, like the body itself, and when the body dies they enter into new combinations to form a new individual. But there is no conscious continuity. The idea of a "self" or a "soul," in fact, is denounced as a heresy. Karma is the only link between one life and another; it determines the conditions of the new set of *skandhas* which replaces the old set dissolved by death. The final ideal of the pious Buddhist is not any thought of personal happiness in a future state. His highest hope is that, freed from *trishnā* or thirst, from *upādāna* or grasping, his virtue will live and work out its full effect in the decrease of the sum of human misery, and not of human misery alone, for the scheme includes all sentient beings, angels and animals as well as men. This is Nirvāna, that extinction of the sinful grasping of mind and heart which would otherwise be the cause of renewed or prolonged existence with its inevitable sorrow.

> "The aching craze to live ends, and life glides—
> Lifeless—to nameless quiet, nameless joy,
> Blessed Nirvāna—sinless, stirless rest—
> That change which never changes."[1]

Karma, says Rhys Davids, is the most stable doctrine of Buddhism, the most universally accepted, and the one that has had the greatest practical effect on the lives of its followers. The Buddhist who does not reach Nirvāna in this life will be born again.

[1] *The Light of Asia*, Book VI.

Of the moral value, of the ethical potentialities, of Buddhism, a striking illustration is afforded by the life of Asoka. "Never in the history of the whole world," says Rhys Davids, "has the bare and barren tree of metaphysical inquiry put forth, where one would least expect it, a more lovely flower—the flower that grew into the fruit which gave the nectar of Nirvāna." Buddha has no place for God in his system—he himself was used by his followers to fill that gap—but he calls men back from vain speculations and empty ritual to right living.

But the high message of Buddhism is for the elect alone; there is little hope for the wayfaring man. Still, "not failure, but low aim, is crime," and although the ordinary follower of Buddha, the man "who binds the sheaf, or builds the house, or digs the grave," may have very little prospect of reaching Nirvāna, it is good for him to enter on the path that leads to it. The eight precepts prescribed for laymen forbid (1) the destruction of life, (2) stealing, "taking that which is not given," (3) lying, (4) drinking intoxicants, (5) unlawful sexual intercourse, (6) eating unseasonable food at night, (7) wearing garlands or using perfumes, and (8) sleeping on a raised bed instead of on a mat spread on the ground. A distinction, however, is made between the first five, which are obligatory on all, while the others are recommendations, either for temporary periods or for life. All, however, should be observed on Sabbath days, which occur at the new moon, at full moon, and at each half moon. For mendicants, two additional commands are to abstain from dancing, singing, music and stage plays, and from the use of silver or gold.

The Order of the Mendicants has been described both as the strength and as the weakness of Buddhism. To it more than anything else—to the Sangha rather than to the Dharma, to the organization rather than to the teaching—the popularity and the rapid spread of Buddhism have been ascribed; but it was this very success, it is said, that led to the expulsion of Buddhism from India, the Brahmans having become jealous of the growing power of the Order. Buddha taught very clearly that outward ceremony was no substitute for inward purity; but believing, as he did, in the vanity of material wealth and the degrading effect of

sensual indulgence, he naturally organized his followers into a society of ascetics. The growth of this society into a powerful corporation, richly endowed by royal gifts of land and money, was no part of the original design; still less had a complete episcopal heirarchy, such as that now found in Tibet, any place in the programme. The Order seems to have developed gradually as Gautama laid down one rule after another for the guidance of those who wished to make rapid progress in the spiritual life. The ten precepts have already been quoted. In the case of mendicants the rule against eating at forbidden times is interpreted to mean the prohibition of solid food between sunrise and noon. No monk is supposed to possess more than eight articles of personal property—three robes, two inner and one outer, saffron coloured, the original idea having been that ordinary rags, once white, were of that hue; a girdle for the loins; a begging bowl, used in going from house to house, collecting the morning meal; a razor—for complete shaving is compulsory; a needle; and a water-strainer eighteen inches square. The last is used for straining drinking water, so that no life may be destroyed. In one respect there is a vital difference between the Buddhist monk and his Christian brother. The former is under no vow of obedience. His aim is self-conquest, and in that no one else can help him, except by advice. There are monks who hold the position of superiors in virtue of their seniority or attainments, and who preside at ceremonies of initiation and ordination, and the others are expected to show them respect and courtesy. But it is to the Law that the monk is devoted. The yellow robe is not essential to salvation, but it is the monastic life alone that brings within measurable distance the goal of Buddhistic aspiration, the peace of Nirvāna.

The stages in saintliness are carefully graded. The first path or stage is that of conversion, the entering upon the stream, the perception of the high spiritual value of companionship with the good, hearing of the Law, enlightened reflection and the practice of virtue. This at once secures freedom from the first three of the ten fetters or evil states of mind—self delusion, doubt (as to Buddha and his doctrines), and the belief in the efficacy of rites and ceremonies. The second stage is that of those who will only once again return

to this world. These have succeeded in weakening the fourth and fifth fetters, those of lust and hatred. The third stage is that of those who will never return, having got rid entirely of these two fetters. The fourth path is that of the Holy ones, who are free from the five remaining fetters—love of earthly life, desire for life in heaven, pride, self-righteousness and ignorance. Those who enter on this fourth path, free from the first five fetters, are Arahats, worthy ones; when they have finished the fourth path by obtaining complete emancipation from all the ten, they are Asekhas.

Buddhist tradition runs that two Church Councils were held between the death of Buddha and the conversion of Asoka; but it is clear that the accounts of the gatherings given in the literature are by no means accurate. Hence scholars hold that, although it is likely that some sort of representative assemblies were held, we know nothing with certainty about them.

Two developments of the very largest import, however, did take place during the time that intervened between these great events. The first was the gradual formation of the Buddhist Canon from the oral teaching of the Buddha and his monastic followers. The process must have been already far advanced when Asoka became a Buddhist; and, at a Council held at his capital before the close of his reign, the list of the authoritative scriptures was finally fixed. This Canon survives in Ceylon, and has formed the basis of all modern study of early Buddhism.

The second change was the rise of Buddhist worship. At first there was no worship in this atheistic society, but a cult gradually grew up round the relics of the founder and the various symbols of the faith. The process was already well advanced in the days of Asoka.

IV.

ASOKA, THE MISSIONARY

One of the obscure points in the history of Asoka, about which there is difference of opinion among the authorities, is whether he became a monk, or whether the position he holds is that of Buddha's most illustrious lay disciple. It is generally believed that he did enter the order, but many scholars maintain that it was not till soon before his death. Whether or not he accomplished the difficult task of combining the duties and reconciling the claims of Monarch and Monk, there is no possible doubt that he was at once Monarch and Missionary. His religious convictions, his desire to propagate the faith he had accepted, were the inspiration of practically all that remains to be told of his achievements.

The date of the Emperor's conversion to Buddhism is fixed at 261 or 260 B.C. The conquest of Kalinga may not have been his first military exploit, but it was apparently the last. As far as we know, he made no further attempts to extend his territory, nor had he any need to do so. The government of his great empire, especially to one who felt the burden of responsibility as he did, must have been more than sufficient to tax all his energies. That he did take the task of government seriously is manifest from two of the Rock Edicts that deal specially with the administration of the newly acquired territory. Kalinga seems to have been governed as a separate province, with a prince of the royal house as Viceroy, the capital being at Tosali, a town which has long ago disappeared and whose site is now a matter of conjecture.

The Edicts,[1] written in Prakrit, the vernacular of Asoka's day, and closely allied to Sanskrit, with differences in

[1] See a table of the Edicts below p. 65.

script and dialect according to locality, seem to have been composed at headquarters and committed to skilled stone cutters to be inscribed on pillars and rocks. "O that my words were now written! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!" This aspiration of Job has been realized in a remarkable way in the case of Asoka. The Rock Edicts are fourteen in number, but in two recensions that have been found on the eastern side of India there are two special edicts dealing with the administration of Kalinga. They are called respectively the Borderers' Edict and the Provincials' Edict, and they take the place of Edicts XI-XIII in the series found in other places. One version, the northern, is inscribed on the smooth prepared surface of a rock called Aswastama, on the northern slope of a hill near the village of Dhauli, about seven miles south of Bhuvanesvar, in the Puri district of Orissa. The inscription is surmounted by the figure of the forepart of an elephant about four feet high, cut out of the solid rock. The site of the southern version is Jaugada, a ruined fort in Ganjam district, in the presidency of Madras. Towards the centre of the fort is a huge mass of granite, upon which the Edicts are inscribed. The fort stands among the ruins of what was once a large city surrounded by a wall. This may have been the Samapa referred to in the Borderers' Edict.

In both Edicts officials are exhorted to do their duty. The phrase, "All men are my children"—suggestive of John Wesley's "The world is my parish"—occurs in both. The "Borderers" were the jungle tribes such as still inhabit the Tributary States of Orissa, and the Emperor is anxious that his officers should win their confidence. His desire is that these people should not be afraid of their new overlord, but should trust him and receive from him not sorrow but happiness. "We conquer but to save," represents the spirit of the proclamation. The simple people are to be told that the King is to them even as a father, loving them as he loves himself. A message in writing would reach only a small proportion of the people, so the command is given that the Borderers' Edict is to be recited at the beginning of each of the three seasons, hot, wet and cool, into which the Indian year is divided, at a certain stage of

the moon, while the Provincials' Edict is to be read aloud once a month. In the Provincials' Edict officials are strictly warned to see that no one is unjustly imprisoned.

These Edicts, as has been said already, are the main source of our knowledge of Asoka. The earliest of the series is now believed to be Minor Rock Edict Number 1, of which copies have been found at Rupnath in the Jabalpur district of the Central Provinces, at Bairat in Rajputana, and at three places, all near each other, in the Chitaldrug district of North Mysore. In Mysore alone there are three copies of a short supplementary second Minor Edict, containing a brief summary of the Law of Piety. As the style differs from that of the other Edicts, it is supposed that it was composed locally in the office of the Prince who was Viceroy of the South, at Suvarnagiri, and published by his authority.

In the first Minor Rock Edict Asoka states that for more than two and a half years he was a lay disciple, "without, however, exerting myself strenuously," but that more than a year before he wrote this Edict he joined the Order, and has exerted himself strenuously. This certainly seems to indicate that for a time at least he became a monk. The door was open for any monk to leave the Order at any time, and Asoka may have adopted for the time the yellow robe, in order to undertake a special mission. As a preaching friar or itinerating missionary, he went through the country, changing camp no fewer than 256 times. This fact itself suggests that the tour was undertaken not in imperial state, but with the simplest outfit. "Let small and great exert himself," Asoka's favourite motto, occurs in this Edict, and intimation is also given of the writer's intention to have his purpose written on the rocks, "both afar off and here; and, wherever there is a stone pillar, it must be written on the stone pillar." The history of Buddhism furnishes at least two examples of monarchs who became monks—a Chinese emperor, Kao-tsu Wu-ti, in the sixth century of the Christian era, and one of the kings of Burma, Bodoahpra, in comparatively recent times (1781-1819). Monk or layman, however, Asoka was evidently the temporal and spiritual head of the Church; he was a Pope with temporal power; he magnified his office as Defender of the Faith.

He was vexed with no theories about the relation of Church and State; both were one and the same, represented by himself. The Royal Hunt was abolished, but it is evident that Asoka retained his kingly rank, if only as a means of more effectively fulfilling what he regarded as his religious duties.

A man's own interest in his religion may fairly be measured by the desire he shows to share its blessings with others. Tried by this test, Asoka proves true. Very soon after his conversion, he turned his thoughts to the spread of the faith he now professed, not only throughout his own dominions and among his own subjects, but to the regions beyond as well, and even to the ends of the earth. If we are not all Buddhists, it was not Asoka's fault. He was one of the greatest missionaries the world has ever seen. Details of the extent of his missionary operations are furnished by the Rock Edicts XIII, V, and II. They embraced parts of three continents—Western Asia, including Syria; Eastern Europe, including Macedonia and the Epirus; and North Africa, including Egypt and Cyrene, as well as places nearer home—the Tamil country in South India, Ceylon, the regions along the slopes of the Himalayas, and the extreme North-West. The fact that this propaganda was undertaken not very long after the conversion of Asoka is established by the calculation that the year 258 B.C. was the latest year in which all the Greek monarchs who are named in the Edicts were alive. In the extreme south of India, Hinduism seems to have been as successful in resisting the tide of Buddhism as it was in after years in rolling back the Moslem invasion. Asoka's territory stopped short at the level of Nellore, about a hundred miles north of Madras City. The Jaugada inscription has been described as the only one in the Madras Presidency, and it is not far from its most northern boundary. The Mysore inscriptions, however, are practically in the Madras Presidency, and much further south than Jaugada, and quite recently, in August, 1915, the announcement was made of the discovery of another inscription, near Raichur,[1] in the Nizam's Dominions,

[1] At Maski, a village in the Raichur district, in the neighbourhood of the ancient deep gold mines of Hutti. It is a copy of Minor Rock

in South India. Missionaries, however, to the Cholas of the Coromandel Coast, to the Pandyas of the extreme south, in the region of Madura and Tinnevelly, and to the people of Malabar and other regions on the West Coast, not only preached the faith but practised the good works which it inspired, making "curative arrangements for men and curative arrangements for beasts," digging wells and planting trees for the enjoyment of man and beast.

It is concerning the mission to Ceylon that we have the fullest account, not in the Edicts, but in the Buddhistic literature of a much later day. As a means of extending the sway of Buddhism, it was undoubtedly the most important and successful of Asoka's missions. The seed of the new faith found in Ceylon a soil in which it grew luxuriantly. There seems to be no doubt that Mahendra, or Mahinda, whom tradition describes as a son of Asoka but who was more probably his younger half-brother on the mother's side, was the Buddhistic apostle of Ceylon. He is said to have been accompanied by a band of monks, and to have taken with him the Pitakas, or scriptures, which had just been settled by the Council of Pataliputra, and which he subsequently translated from the Pali into the Sinhalese Prakrit. The mission took place during the reign of Tissa, king of Ceylon from 258 to 230 B.C. In the chronicles he is named by one of the titles Asoka bore, *Devanan piya*, the Beloved of the gods, and it is probable that it was borrowed from Asoka as a tribute of respect. Tradition also says that Mahendra was accompanied by his sister, Sanghamitra, the Friend of the Order, a daughter of Asoka, and that she, again, was accompanied by a band of nuns. It is very doubtful if she ever existed; the whole tendency of the local writers is to make out that the conversion of Ceylon to Buddism took place in a miraculously short time, while in reality it was a slower process than they are willing to admit. It is to Sanghamitra that the credit is given of having brought from Gaya a branch of the sacred Bo-tree, which was planted at Anuradhapura, the

Edict I, and is remarkable as being the only inscription which contains the name Asoka, the King in all other cases being called *Devanan Piya*, or *Piyadasi*.

ancient capital of Ceylon. Sanghamitra may be a myth, but this wonderful tree is a fact. One of the reliefs on the great Buddhist stupa at Sanchi in the Bhopal State, dating perhaps from 120 B.C., represents the carrying of the Bo-tree from Buddha-Gaya to Ceylon. In roadside tree-planting to-day, it is a common plan, if a tree is wanted to fill a gap, to cut off the branch of a *pipal* tree and plant it; it may die, but just as often, if not oftener, it lives, and we have a new tree perhaps ten feet high to begin with. The Bo-tree among the ruins of Anuradhapura is the oldest historical tree in the world. It has been preserved with jealous care by the monks, and whenever it has shown signs of decay terraces of earth have been built up to support it, while rude pillars of iron and masonry have been used to support the branches. Planted originally on a slightly raised terrace, it now springs from the centre of a small hill about twenty feet high. It has been carefully watered in times of drought. Planted by King Tissa himself, who is said to have received it, if not by the hand of Sanghamitra then in some other way, as a gift from Asoka, about the year 245 B.C., it is now about 2,400 years old. What is believed by the devout pilgrim to be the parent tree at Buddh-Gaya is of more modern growth, but it is possible that it grew from the roots of the tree that actually sheltered Gautama.

The King of Ceylon showed his admiration for Asoka in more ways than by using his name. He also followed his example in erecting many beautiful and costly buildings in support of his new religion. Anuradhapura had been made the capital of the island before his day, but it was he who made it a city that is still impressive, even in its ruined state. The most remarkable of his buildings was the Thuparama Dagaba, which was a solid dome, seventy feet high, rising from a decorated plinth in the centre of a square terrace and surrounded by a number of beautiful granite pillars in two rows. These pillars bear an interesting resemblance to those which Asoka erected, and it is doubtful to say what purpose they served. The dome was supposed to contain relics of the Buddha.[1]

[1] See article on Anuradhapura, by Rhys Davids, in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Vol. I.

In the same neighbourhood King Tissa built a monastery for the monks who had come from India, and eight miles away a cave was hollowed out of the solid rock on the precipitous side of the Mihintale hill, which served as Mahendra's study during the rest of his life. Steps had to be cut out of the rock to make the cave accessible. It contains a couch, also cut out of the rock. From the entrance to the cave a magnificent view of the country is obtained. Here, it is said, Mahendra lived, died and was buried. "I shall not easily forget the day," writes Rhys Davids, "when I first entered that lonely, cool, and quiet chamber, so simple and yet so beautiful, where more than 2,000 years ago the great teacher of Ceylon had sat, and thought, and worked through the long years of his peaceful and useful life."[1]

Another work of piety undertaken by Asoka was a pilgrimage to the places associated with the Buddha. This was undertaken in 249 B.C. The commemorative records on pillars at Rummindei and Nigliva, in the Nepalese Tarai, testify that Asoka visited the Lumbini Garden where the Teacher was born, and also the *stupa* of Konakamana. Buddhists believed that there had been many Buddhas before Gautama, and that Konakamana had been one of them. Asoka had enlarged this *stupa* or sacred cupola six years earlier, a fact which indicates that the cult of "former Buddhas" was already established in his day. Tradition, less trustworthy than the testimony of the rocks, says that Kapilavastu, Bodh-Gaya, Sarnath near Benares, Kusinagara, the monastery at Sravasti, where Gautama long resided, and the *stupas* of his disciples, Vakkula and Ananda, were also included in the tour.

The critic of Foreign Missions cannot accuse Asoka of having neglected duties at home in his desire to extend the faith in lands distant and remote. On the other hand, he illustrates the familiar rule that it is those who are most zealous for the propagation of their religion throughout the world who are at the same time most conscientious in fulfilling their obligations towards their next-door neighbours. Asoka, as has been said, was great as a foreign missionary—until he

[1] *Buddhism*, p. 231.

appeared the idea of foreign missions had never been thought of; at the same time it would be difficult to name a monarch who devoted more care or attention to the welfare of his own subjects. Here, again, the Edicts furnish us with indisputable proofs, and supply materials for the construction of one of the most impressive figures in the history of royalty.

Early in the reign, a system of quinquennial official circuits (triennial in at least two provinces, Ujjain and Taxila) was organized for the more thorough instruction of the people in the Law of Piety or the Law of Duty. *Dhamma*, the colloquial form of *dharma*, is the word used. In the Edicts it does not stand for Buddhism, but for the simple piety which Asoka wished all his subjects of whatever faith to practice. Officers of all ranks were expected to combine the work of teachers with their ordinary duties. Somewhat the same principle was followed, among the highest officials at least, in the palmy days of Portuguese rule in India.

In the year 256 B.C. a further administrative measure was the appointment of special officers of high rank, *Dharma-mahamatras*, whose exclusive duty it was to enforce the Edicts concerning the Law of Piety. These were assisted by subordinates, *Dharma-yuktas*, and while their supervision was to extend to the border tribes and to the adherents of other faiths, the households of the King's brothers, sisters and other relatives were not to be neglected.

In his legislation and administration there were two virtues to which the Emperor attached the utmost importance. One was a regard for the sanctity of animal life; the other was reverence towards parents, instructors, and other superiors. Asoka's dislike of blood-shedding may have been a reaction against the wholesale slaughter for domestic purposes that characterised the court in his unregenerate days. According to his own confession in the first of the Fourteen Rock Edicts, many hundred thousands of living creatures had been slaughtered every day in the royal kitchen to make curries. The supply was afterwards reduced to two peacocks and one antelope daily, the antelope, however, not invariably. "Even these three living creatures henceforth shall not be slaughtered," the Edict concludes. It is understood that from the thirteenth

regnal year Asoka became a vegetarian. The slaughter of animals for sacrifice was forbidden, but it is improbable that a command like this was very strictly obeyed. Even all merry-makings involving the use of meat were prohibited. The suppression of the Royal Hunt was a matter of course. An elaborate list of regulations was drawn up with the object of preventing as far as possible even the mutilation of animals. The caponing of cocks was absolutely forbidden, and while the custom of castrating young bulls could not very well be suppressed in a land where oxen are the principal draught animals, Asoka set the seal of his displeasure upon it by making it unlawful on all holy days, which amounted to about a fourth part of the year. The castration of he-goats, rams and boars, and the branding of horses and cows were treated in the same way; permitted, under restrictions, but disapproved of. There was also a "close time" ordained for animals whose slaughter was not absolutely forbidden. Even the capture of fish was forbidden for fifty-six days in the year. From the point of view of modern Hinduism the most remarkable omission in this code is that it did not interdict outright the killing of cows or make of it a special crime.

The prohibition of animal-sacrifice was probably the most intolerant act of which Asoka was guilty. It must have given great offence to his Hindu subjects, in whose religion in his time animal-sacrifice was very prominent; and the reaction soon came. A Hindu family overthrew his effete descendants in 185 B.C.

It has been claimed for Asoka's code that in the regard it paid to the prevention of cruelty to dumb animals it exceeded anything that even Christian legislation has yet accomplished. Allowance must be made, however, for the influence of the Hindu doctrine of re-incarnation, and especially of the doctrine of *ahimsa* which was current in India even before the time of the Buddha. It has been traced back to the Upanisads in the seventh century B.C., and it was made the main article of their creed by the Jains. Its influence has not been exclusively or invariably beneficial. When vermin are preserved alive in time of plague, although it is known that they are means of spreading the disease, while starving children are left to die

in time of famine, it is manifest that a sense of proportion has been lost and the principle of humanitarianism perverted. The "curative arrangements for beasts" no doubt included institutions like the *pinjrapol*, or asylum for animals, but these institutions were founded by the Jains and are still maintained by them in many parts of India. Hamilton's description of a *pinjrapol* he visited at Surat in 1820 might be written by a visitor of to-day. He describes it as the most remarkable institution in Surat. Any animal with a broken limb or disabled in any way was admitted without any regard to the caste of its owner. Among the inmates there had been a tortoise which was known to have been there for seventy-five years. There was a special ward for "rats, mice, bugs, and other noxious vermin, for whom suitable food was provided."

On the other hand, Asoka's code has been criticised on the ground that it attached a higher value to animal than to human life. Here, again, Hinduism may have had its influence. "Is not a man better than a sheep?" is not just axiomatic in India; so much depends upon who the man is, and upon what the sheep may have been. Wells may be open to sheep and cattle, but closed to certain castes of men. It must not be supposed, however, that Asoka was indifferent to the welfare of his fellowmen. Far from it. It is true that he did not abolish the death penalty, as some traditions assert, and as seemed to be the natural result of a policy that strove so hard to protect animal life. But he went ahead of his time in allowing the condemned criminal a respite of three days before execution, in order that he might have time to prepare for the next world. Both man and beast shared the benefits of the trees he planted and the wells he dug and the rest-houses he built along the sides of the roads. "Aye be stickin' in a tree, John," says the old Laird of Dumbiedykes to his son, "it'll be growin' while you're sleepin'." One has only to know the difference that shady trees and cool water from the well make to weary travellers under an Indian sun to understand how both tree-planting and well-digging have come to be regarded as works of special merit. Many thousands must have blessed the name of Asoka as they rested at midday under his trees, and drew water from his wells.

The Hospital as we see it to-day is to a large extent a Christian institution. No doubt the temples of Asklepios in Greece, to which the sick went for healing, served to some extent the same purpose, and the Romans may have made tentative efforts to provide in some way for sick soldiers and slaves. But if we look for a distinct anticipation of the Christian Hospital we shall probably find that it was included among the "curative arrangements for men" that Asoka organized. He was certainly the pioneer in this field of philanthropy in India. His example was followed by certain philanthropic citizens of Pataliputra in the time of the Guptas. The best era in the history of purely Indian medicine was contemporary with the ascendancy of Buddhism, when the public hospitals which the Buddhist princes had established in every great city were the schools of medical study. As Brahmanism resumed its sway the hospitals disappeared and the practice of medicine, involving so much that to the Hindu was ceremonially unclean, was relegated to charlatans. The greatest names in Hindu medicine, Charaka and Susruta, belong to the Buddhistic period. After it had passed no progress was made till the Muhammadans came in. Their Arabic works on medicine were to some extent translations from ancient Sanskrit writers, but were derived in the main from the Greeks.[1]

Asoka's sagacity was also shown in his efforts to cultivate medicinal herbs, both in his own and other countries. "The drowsy syrups of the East" have always held an important place in the pharmacopœias of the world, and many other drugs of a useful kind are derived from the wild plants and jungle trees of India. Judging from the most recent edition of the British Pharmacopœia (1914), we may say that Western medicine is becoming more disposed than ever to recognize and to utilize the indigenous drugs of India. As he no doubt initiated the hospital system for human creatures in India, Asoka may also be said to have set the example in tree-planting that led, after a very long interval of years, to the organization of a Department of Forestry by the British Government of India, with untold benefits to the country, while as a grower of medicinal

[1] *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1907), Vol. IV, p. 457-8.

herbs he was the precursor of the scientific botanists who are now adding to the world's supply of quinine by the produce of the Government Cinchona plantations.

Asoka was a master builder. He was the first in India to build in stone. The roads he made would very likely be scheduled by a district engineer of the present day as "fourth class," neither metalled nor bridged, and we know not whether his wells were *kacha* or *pakka*;[1] but as a builder in stone he challenges comparison with his rivals of all ages in any land. Many of his erections were so vast and the workmanship so beautiful that the popular belief was that they were due to supernatural agency, that Asoka, like Prospero on the enchanted island, had spirits "correspondent to command," to do the deeds that human hands could never accomplish.

An account has already been given of the palace at Pataliputra, whose ruins commemorate the greatness of Asoka as a monarch. The works that were inspired by his religious zeal are in their own way hardly less remarkable. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, describes a stone *stupa*, a hundred feet high, which he saw at a town called Kapisa, somewhere in Kafiristan, and another, three hundred feet in height and richly decorated, at Nangrahar, near Jalalabad, on the Kabul river. The tradition that he built five hundred Buddhistic monasteries in Kashmir is no doubt an exaggeration, but there are many evidences that the beautiful valley was one of the scenes of his activity. The old city, of uncertain site, which preceded Srinagar as the capital of Kashmir, was founded by Asoka.

Nepal is another secluded valley where traces are still to be found of Asoka's power as a monarch and zeal as a missionary. His pilgrimage to the places sacred to the memory of the Buddha in the Nepalese Tarai was continued through the mountain passes into Nepal itself, and, always doing things on the grand scale, he determined to found a new capital as a memorial of his visit. He selected a site on some rising ground about two miles to the south-east of Katmandu, which is still the capital of the State but which

[1] "Kacha" and "pakka," "raw" and "ripe" (or baked') are applied in India to mud and masonry (in the case of roads metalled) work, respectively.

was known in those days as Manju Patan. Asoka's new city was called Lalita Patan, and it still exists, many of the buildings bearing his name. In the centre of the city he built a large temple which still stands, and four large hemispherical *stupas* which he erected to the north, south, east and west of the city are still to be seen. The Emperor, it is said, was accompanied on this tour by his daughter, Charumati, whose husband was a Kshatriya named Devapala. Charumati and her husband resolved to make Nepal their home, and they founded Deva Patan, near the holy shrine of Pasupati. They were blessed with a large family, and in old age they resolved to spend their remaining days in religious retirement. Each of them also took a vow to build a retreat for members of the Order. Charumati fulfilled her design, and died within her own nunnery which still stands to commemorate her piety. Her husband was not so fortunate; his last days were darkened by the regret that he was unable to complete the building of his monastery.

The *stupa* or tope or cupola was one of Asoka's favourite structures, and they have in many places survived the more imposing buildings. There was a group of ten of them, still in a good state of preservation, at and near Sanchi, in the Bhopal State, early last century. The *stupa*, as built by Asoka, was a tumulus, or nearly hemispherical mass of solid masonry, possibly in imitation of a grave, either of brick or stone. It rested upon a platform upon which worshippers walked round it, and it was flattened on the top to carry a square altar-shaped structure which was surmounted again by a series of stone umbrellas, one above another. Embellishments often included a highly ornate stone railing round the platform or plinth, with elaborately carved gateways. The *stupa* was intended, as a rule, to enshrine a casket containing the relics of Buddha or some other saint, or to mark the scene of some incident famous in the history of the Buddhistic church, or it was simply built to the glory of Buddha.

The principal *stupa* at Sanchi, believed to have been built by Asoka about 250 B.C., occupies a conspicuous site on the summit of a small hill about three hundred feet high. It is a solid segment of a sphere, built of red sandstone

blocks, with a diameter of one hundred and ten feet at the base. There is a sloping platform round about it, which provides a raised pathway five and a half feet wide, and this raises the measurement of the total diameter to one hundred and twenty-one and a half feet. The pinnacle which once surmounted the dome has disappeared since 1819; along with it the height is estimated to have been seventy-seven and a half feet. For purposes of comparison it may be mentioned that the height of the shaft of Cleopatra's Needle on the Thames Embankment is seventy feet, a few feet less than that of the Sanchi *stupa*. The height of the Octerlony Monument in Calcutta is one hundred and sixty-five feet, and according to the Chinese pilgrim one at least of the *stupas* he saw in Afghanistan was much higher. A massive stone railing with monolithic uprights eleven feet high, and richly carved gates thirty-four feet in height, surrounds the Sanchi stupa, but this erection is believed to have been added about two hundred years after the *stupa* was built. In 1868 Napoleon III wrote to the Begum of Bhopal, asking for one of these gates as a gift, but the Government of India intervened, refusing to allow the removal of the gate, but arranging for a plaster cast to be sent to Paris instead. Similar casts are to be seen at South Kensington, Dublin, Edinburgh and elsewhere.

A fragment of an Edict Pillar of Asoka has also been unearthed at Sanchi. The five and a half miles of country lying between Sanchi and Bhilsa on the Midland Section of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway, is said to contain the most extensive Buddhistic remains now known in India, but most of them belong to a later date than Asoka's reign.

Another *stupa* of more moderate size, sixty-eight feet in diameter, was discovered by Sir Alexander Cunningham at Bharhut, in the small Native State of Nagod, ninety-five miles south-west of Allahabad. The surrounding railings, seven feet high, and the gateways had been covered with sculptures illustrating the Buddha Birth Stories. Portions of the railings are now preserved in the Calcutta Museum. This *stupa*, like that which is at Sanchi, is believed to date from Asoka's time.

Asoka's Pillars have a two-fold interest for us. They are among the manuscripts on which his Edicts are written, and they are perhaps the finest extant specimens of his artistic and architectural genius. About thirty in number, they all consist of fine sandstone, polished to a degree that baffles imitation by modern skill working in the same material. They were probably quarried at Chunar in the district of Mirzapur, and either the rough blocks or the finished pillars must in many cases have been transported hundreds of miles to the places where they were to be erected. Two of them, one uninscribed, the other inscribed, still stand in perfect condition in North Bihar. The former is at Bakhira, near Basar, the ancient Vaisali, in Muzaffarpur, and the latter is at Lauriya-Nandangarh in Champaran. The Bakhira Pillar stands thirty-two feet high above water level, and the shaft, about fifty inches in diameter at the base, tapers to a diameter of 38·7 inches at the top. The capital is surmounted by a seated lion, four and a half feet high. The total height above water, including the mouldings between the shaft and the capital and the pedestal on which the lion sits, is forty-four feet, two inches. The entire height, including the portion that is submerged, is estimated to be about fifty feet and the weight fifty tons.

The Lauriya-Nandangarh Pillar resembles that which has just been described in general design. It, too, is surmounted by a lion, but it is lighter and less massive, the entire height being about forty feet. A picture of this pillar forms a frontispiece to Mr. Vincent Smith's book on Asoka. These two pillars, together with others at Lauriya-Araraj (Radhiah) and Rampurwa, are believed to mark the course of a royal road that once ran from the north of the Ganges, opposite Pataliputra, to the foot of the Himalayas.

There is a well-known Pillar at Allahabad, and two are near Delhi, one of them situated on the historic Ridge. These two were transplanted by the Muhammadan Sultan, Firoz Shah, from their original sites at Topra, near Ambala in the Panjab, and at Meerut, in the United Provinces, respectively. The account of the feat of transporting the pillar from Topra to Delhi, a distance of about a hundred and twenty miles, written by a contemporary historian and reproduced by Mr. V. A. Smith, helps us to realize the

immense amount of labour and ingenuity that must have been expended in conveying some of the heavier pillars much longer distances. The pillar was made to fall in a soft bed prepared of silk cotton. Wrapped from top to bottom in reeds and raw hides, it was raised on to a carriage with forty-two wheels, which was hauled by 8,400 men, two hundred men pulling a strong rope that was attached to each of the wheels. Part of the journey was accomplished by boat on the Jumna, and an elaborate arrangement of windlasses was devised by which the pillar was raised, eighteen inches at a time, to the erect posture on the Delhi site.

The Deer Park near Benares, where the Buddha delivered his first sermon,[1] is now known as Sarnath. The buildings still standing, the excavations, and the museum in which all valuable finds are preserved, make the place well worth a visit. Only a few years ago (1905) a beautiful specimen of Asoka's art was discovered there by Mr. Oertel. It is the broken capital of a pillar of the Persian bell-shaped type, with four lions crowning it. In the Annual Report of the Archæological Survey for 1904-5, Mr. (now Sir) John H. Marshall says that both the bell and the lions are in an excellent state of preservation, and master-pieces in point of both style and technique—"the finest carvings, indeed, that India has yet produced, and unsurpassed, I venture to think, by anything of their kind in the ancient world."

The Persepolitan type of ornamentation is not confined to the Sarnath capital, and the belief that it indicates Persian influence has been greatly strengthened by the discoveries at Pataliputra already referred to. The pillar, in fact, which occupies so prominent a place in the work of Asoka, and for which he seems to have had a particularly strong liking, is believed to have been derived from the Achæmenian school of architecture.

In the days of Asoka there were a number of ascetics known as Ajivikas, who had a curious history and an uneviable reputation. The founder of the sect, Gosala—which means cowshed, a name given to him because he was said to have been born in an edifice of that description—was a

[1] See above, p. 34; also Frontispiece.

contemporary of Mahavira and was for some time associated with him. He quarrelled with the Jains, however, refusing to submit to all the restrictions they imposed, and founded a school of his own. Both Mahavira and Buddha condemned the sect as heretical in doctrine and immoral in conduct. Gosala's followers went stark naked. One explanation they gave of this rule was that the founder of their order, in the days of his secular youth, had been a servant. He broke an oil vessel through carelessness, and, fearing punishment, resolved to flee. His master, however, caught him by his cloth, and as he broke away he left his garment in his master's hand. He fled naked to a village, where the people offered him clothes; but he refused them, having made up his mind to adopt the life of a holy man. One of the charges brought against him by ascetics of the stricter schools was that he adopted this life, not from any high religious motive, but simply as a means of making a living. For these ascetics, however, Asoka provided habitations which hold a place by themselves among his works of architecture. He excavated caves for them out of the solid rock of the Barabar and Nagarjuni Hills near Gaya. The largest is the Gopika cave, forty-five and a half feet long and a little more than nineteen feet wide, with semi-circular ends and a vaulted roof ten and a half feet in height. The whole interior is said to be polished like a mirror.

A description of the architectural monuments of Asoka, among which the inscribed pillars hold a conspicuous place while the Rock Edicts were also to some extent works of art, suggests the question: What can be said about the social condition of the people he ruled? The inscriptions were evidently meant to be read. The pillars were erected on public highways, at the shrines frequented by pilgrims, and at other places of popular resort. The language used is the vernacular, and local dialects are utilized. It would surely have been an unjustifiable waste of money and labour to publish the inscriptions in this way if they were meant merely for the instruction of officials. We are surely entitled to believe that they were meant to be read by a considerable number of the people, by the small as well as the great, to all of whom they appealed; and this fact alone makes it probable that education was a

little more general in India in the time of Asoka than it ever had been before or than it was afterward. Yet schools are never mentioned in the edicts. On the whole, India under Asoka seems to have reached a higher standard of material civilization than she attained to again until the days of the Moghul Empire. It has been said, indeed, that the civil and military government of the Mauryas was better organized than that of Akbar and Shahjehan.[1]

The Edicts, however, only give us the intentions, the ambitions, the ideals of their author. We have very little information regarding the extent to which these were realized. The weak point in the Government of India has always been and still is in the executive, in the lack of a subordinate agency to which the task of carrying into effect the good intentions of the rulers can be entrusted. Legislative measures that have been passed for the protection of the people become, in the hands of unscrupulous underlings, new means of oppression, and every department of State affords opportunities for corruption. Asoka's drastic efforts to impose the Law of Dhamma upon the entire people must have given his agents a great deal of power, and, if human nature was the same thing in those days as it is now, it is almost certain that this power was sometimes abused. In seeking to estimate the success of Asoka's efforts, we must also take into account the innate conservatism of the great mass of the people, especially in their social life.

A word must be said, however, regarding Asoka's attitude towards the followers of other religions. Students of the Edicts profess to find in them evidence of a growing spirit of toleration, and if the dates which are assigned to them are correct this seems capable of proof. In what is believed to be the earliest Edict, the first Minor Rock Edict, of the thirteenth regnal year, or 257 B.C., it is stated that as the result of the Emperor's exertions "the men who were all over India regarded as true have been with their gods shown to be untrue." The reference is no doubt to the Brahmans, and it is inconsistent with the tone of what are believed to be the later Edicts. In these the duty of giving alms to

[1] Vincent A. Smith, *Asoka*, p. 138.

Brahmans as well as to other ascetics is inculcated. The King, as we have seen, declares all men to be his children, a sentiment derived from Buddha. People are implored to abstain from speaking ill of their neighbours' faith. One of the Pillar Edicts, the Sixth, of the year 243 B.C., insists upon the necessity of every person having a definite religious creed. At the same time, while freedom in belief was allowed, all denominations were required to conform to the rules of conduct framed by the King.

Asoka not only preached toleration, but practised it as well. Buddhistic shrines and monasteries had the first claim upon his liberality, but Jains and Brahmans shared his beneficence, and his patronage of the disreputable Ajivika ascetics in the Barabar Hills has just been referred to. He probably thought that even their religion was better than none, and in any case it was a meritorious work to hew dwelling places for them out of the rocky hillside.

Buddhistic traditions attach much importance to a Church Council which Asoka is said to have convened at Pataliputra for the purpose of suppressing heresy. The Edicts contain no definite mention of such a Council, but the Sarnath Edict, to which a date towards the end of Asoka's reign is assigned, is supposed to have been published as the result of the deliberations of this assembly. The object of the proclamation is that "the Church be not rent in twain by any person." Whosoever, monk or nun, shall break the unity of the Church, is to be compelled to wear white garments and to dwell in a place not reserved for the clergy; in other words, he or she is to be unfrocked and expelled.

Asoka's reign is said to have come to an end in 242 B.C. The tradition that, like his grandfather, he became a monk a year or two before his death, has been mentioned. Nothing is known regarding the circumstances of his death, and it is strange that not even a stone marks the last resting place of one of the greatest builders of all time.

Of the history of the Maurya dynasty after the death of Asoka there is little to be said because little is known. We infer from the Edicts that he had many sons and grandsons, but only one of the sons is mentioned by name, Tivara, son of the second queen, Karuvaki. It would

appear, however, that it was a grandson, Dasaratha, who succeeded to the throne. His name, at any rate, is the first to occur in authentic history after Asoka's. Like his grandfather, Dasaratha dedicated caves to the use of the Ajivika ascetics in the district of Gaya. These caves are in the Nagarjuni Hills and they bear inscriptions by Dasaratha. Nothing is known with certainty of the other members of the line.

> "As in a theatre, the eyes of men,
> After a well-graced actor leaves the stage
> Are idly bent on him that enters next,
> Thinking his prattle to be tedious,"

so history has little to tell us of the kings who followed Asoka. There is evidence in the Puranas that the empire, as it had been in the days of Asoka, came to an end about the year 185 B.C., fifty-seven years after the death of Asoka, after having lasted for 133 or 137 years from the time of its creation by Chandragupta. The end is said to have been brought about by an incident of a kind that is very familiar in Oriental history and in ancient history generally—a Commander-in-chief, Pushyamitra Sunga by name, murdered his king, Brihadratha, and usurped the throne. So the Maurya dynasty ended very much as it had begun, in murder.

Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim to the Buddhistic shrines in India in the sixth century after Christ, says that shortly before his arrival Purnavarman, Raja of Magadha, had piously restored the Bo-Tree at Buddh-Gaya, which Sasanka, King of Bengal, had destroyed. It is possible that after the break up of the empire, Asoka's family descendants retained for centuries the rank and position of local chieftains.

To follow in detail the fortunes of the religion which Asoka did so much to establish and extend, would take us far beyond the limits of this sketch, but a brief survey of it is necessary if we are to be in a position to estimate the influence of his work beyond his own country and lifetime. At first there seemed to be every prospect that the spiritual system would survive dissolution of the temporal power. Buddhism continued to spread, and by the beginning of the Christian era it had acquired much power in India. A great emigration from Western India carried it to Java,

Asoka's missionary efforts in Ceylon had far-reaching consequences, for it was from there that Buddhism spread to Burma and Siam. Burma, it is true, was invaded from the north as well by Indian Buddhism, but after a struggle the purer teaching of the southern school prevailed. In India itself Buddhism made very extensive conquests, especially in the north-west. King Kanishka, who in the first century of the Christian era ruled over a kingdom almost as extensive as Asoka's had been, has often been described as a second Asoka. From his capital at Purusapura, the modern Peshawar, he ruled over all the country which is now included in Afghanistan, and was lord paramount of practically the whole of North-West India and also of Western India from Nasik to Ujjain. His sway extended over Kashmir, Ladak, the Central Himalayas, and a large part of Central Asia. Recent discoveries have shed much light upon his interesting personality. His predecessors on the throne seem to have patronized all the religions of the Empire, and Kanishka also did so to some extent; but Buddhist tradition claims him as a convert, and his actions seem to afford some justification of the statement. Like Asoka, he afforded permanent testimony to his religious leanings by the erection of splendid buildings. One of these was a lofty *stupa* at Peshawar, the foundations of which have recently been excavated, with interesting results. Among the relics recovered was a casket engraved with the names of Kanishka and of Agesilaus, his Greek engineer, and also with images of the former. In the traditions of the Buddhistic schools of North India, Tibet, China and Mongolia, King Kanishka is famous chiefly as the convener of a Buddhistic Council of five hundred monks, which assembled in Kashmir, or, according to some authorities, at Jalandhar in the Panjab. The members of this Council composed three commentaries, which King Kanishka caused to be engraved on plates of copper. These were sealed in a stone box, which was committed to the safe custody of a *dagaba* specially built for their reception. The most recent explorations on the site of Taxila tend to modify the traditional view of the influence exerted by Kanishka in the propagation of Buddhism in the North-West of India. The evidence of coins and

buildings seems to show that Buddhism was firmly established in that region at an earlier date, in the Scytho-Parthian epoch.[1]

Early in the Christian era the Mahayana school came into prominence, and the cleavage took place which still persists between the followers of the Great and the Smaller Vehicle. The feature of the Mahayana doctrine is universalism, the larger hope—hence the name. Primitive Buddhism preached a narrow way, it appealed to the elect, to those who were prepared to surrender all. The intrinsic difference between the two schools, according to one authority, is that the Mahayana doctrine "substituted for the agnostic idealism and simple morality of Buddha a speculative theistic system with a mysticism of sophistic nihilism in the background."[2]

It was from India, round the north-west of the Himalayas and across Eastern Turkestan, that Buddhism early in its history reached China, where it became the State religion in the fourth century of our era. Thence it spread to Korea, Japan and Mongolia.

It is from the Chinese pilgrims that we receive much interesting information about Buddhism in India during the period of its decay. Of these pilgrims, whose devotion to the Buddha led them to undertake what must have been in those days a very laborious journey, the most famous were Fa-Hien, whose visit is dated 399 to 413 A.D., and Hiuen Tsang, who followed two hundred years later, 629 to 645 A.D. The first found the Brahmans and the Buddhists working together in friendly co-operation. By the time of Hiuen Tsang's visit, however, Brahmanism was in the ascendant, although Buddhism still had the support of the most powerful Indian monarch of the day, Harsha, who ruled at Kanauj in the Ganges-Jumna Doab. King Kapisa, who ruled over the ten kingdoms of Afghanistan, and the rulers of Kashmir and of several smaller States, were also Buddhists. The period of rapid decay dates from about 750 A.D. In

[1] Sir John H. Marshall's Report of the Archæological Survey for 1912-13.

[2] Colonel Waddell, quoted in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. I, p. 411.

the eleventh century Buddhism still survived in outlying provinces like Kashmir and Orissa, and also in its early home in Bihar; but before long the Muhammadan invasion completed the work of expulsion or extinction which had been begun by the Brahmans. Buddhism in India still survives along the southern slopes of the Himalayas, in North-East Bengal, and in scattered places in the Panjab, the contact with Tibet and Burma helping in most of these cases to keep the sacred fire alive. It is said that the only survivors of purely Indian Buddhism in India today are a small community in the Orissa States. They are known as Saraks, from Sravaka, "hearer," a Buddhistic term for a second order of monks residing in monasteries, and they number in all about 2,000 souls. They worship certain Hindu deities, but also venerate the Buddha, observing as festivals the full moon days in the months of Baisakh and Kartik, which they regard as the dates of Buddha's birth and of his attainment of Nirvāna. They do not celebrate Hindu festivals or employ Brahman priests.[1] Of the 10,700,000 Buddhists enumerated in the Census of India in 1911, all but one-third of a million were in Burma, where they constitute at least ninety-one per cent. of the Burmese population. A feature of Burmese Buddhism illustrates one of the characteristics of the religion which has been more or less manifest throughout its history, and that is its ability to co-exist with other religions. As many of the early Buddhists in India remained Hindus, as the Chinaman combines Buddhism with Confucianism and Taoism, so the real faith of the Burmese, we are told, is demon-worship. The real religion is Animism, a belief in the *nats* or spirits. This Nat-worship is the most important and pervading thing in the practical, everyday life of the people. Even the Buddhist monasteries are protected by the Nats; their shrines stand beside the pagodas; and the Buddhist monks or *pongyis* themselves take part in Animistic rites, and act as experts in astrology and fortune-telling.[2] In many cases Buddhism has been adopted not so

[1] *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. I, p. 125.

[2] See Sir Richard Temple, in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, art. Burma, Vol. III.

much as a religion in itself but as a system or morals which may be super-imposed upon any creed.

The Jain religion, which in its origin resembled Buddhism in being a revolt from the yoke of Brahmanism, had its beginnings in the same district and about the same time. Mahavira, who became known as Jina, "the Victorious"—hence the name of the sect,—was a native of Bihar, and was an older contemporary of the Buddha. Although originally democratic and universalistic, it never adopted an active missionary policy, or at least a foreign missionary policy. The Jains have had no Asoka. Unlike Buddhism, it did not aspire to world empire, but, unlike Buddhism, it survives in an active state in India to-day. It is, in fact, the sole survivor of the early monastic orders. It has never severed itself so completely from Brahmanism as was the case with Buddhism, and Brahman priests are found to-day officiating in Jain temples. As a practical organization the Jain religion is said to be even more democratic than Buddhism. Lay brothers and lay sisters were organized by Mahavira, and formed as truly a part of the Jain body as the monks and nuns.

V.

ASOKA, THE SCRIBE

FREQUENT references have already been made to the inscriptions that Asoka caused to be engraved on pillars and rocks, and several quotations have been made from them; but their importance as sources of information about Asoka and his times, and as specimens of his artistic zeal, makes it desirable, at the risk of some repetition, to devote a chapter to a brief account of them collectively.

These inscriptions have been classified by Mr. Vincent A. Smith, in harmony with the views of two other high authorities, M. Senart and Mr. F. W. Thomas, as far as possible in the following chronological order:—

I. EDICTS.

Two (or Three) Minor Rock Edicts ..	B.C. 257
The Bhabra Edict, possibly about the same date.	
Fourteen Rock Edicts	B.C. 257 to 256
The Kalinga Edicts	„ 256 or 255?
Seven Pillar Edicts	„ 243 and 242
Four Minor Pillar Edicts	„ 241 and 232

II. MISCELLANEOUS INSCRIPTIONS.

The Cave Dedications of Asoka ..	B.C. 257 and 250
Two Tarai Commemorative Inscriptions	„ 249
Cave Dedications of Dasaratha.. ..	„ 232?

In the first and more important section there are thus thirty documents, if we may call them so, or, if the two versions of the First Minor Rock Edict be counted separately, thirty-one. If Dasaratha's inscription be included in the second group, and it resembles those of Asoka so closely both in substance and in circumstances that this seems to be justifiable, the total number of inscriptions is thirty-five. Different versions of the same Edict, with only verbal variations, are enumerated.

The First Minor Rock Edict is Asoka's Confession of Faith, and it contains his favourite words of exhortation, "Let small and great exert themselves." Three copies are found in North India, the best at Rupnath in Jabalpur, inscribed upon a great boulder of rock. The place is remote and jungly, infested by wild animals. It is fourteen miles west of Sleemanabad Road railway station, on the Jabalpur extension of the East Indian Railway. A natural feature of the place is a series of three pools, one above another, which are connected in the rainy season by a waterfall. This may have led to the site being now considered sacred as a shrine of Siva.

The two other copies in the north are at Sahasram in Shahabad (South Bihar), where it is engraved on the face of a rock in an artificial cave; and at Bairat, in the State of Jaipur, in Rajputana, where the inscription is found on the face of a huge block of volcanic rock that lies at the foot of a hill. Three more copies, only slightly different, are found near each other in the Chitaldurg district of northern Mysore, at Brahmagiri, Siddapura, and Jatinga-Ramesvara. These mark the most southern limit of all the inscriptions.

The Second Minor Edict, brief, and in a style different from that in which the others are composed, is supplementary to the First. It gives a short summary of the Law of Piety or of Duty, which consists in obedience to parents, reverence towards relatives and teachers, respect for living creatures, and truthfulness. This Edict, it has been surmised, was composed and issued at Suvarnagiri, by the Prince who was the Viceroy of the South.

The Bhabra Edict also holds a peculiar place in the group. It was inscribed on a boulder within the precincts of a Buddhist monastery on the top of another hill near the Rajputana town of Bairat, which has just been mentioned, but it has been removed for safe custody to Calcutta. In it His Grace the King of Magadha greets the Church, and professes his respect for and faith in the Buddha, the Sacred Law and the Church. Mr. Vincent Smith compares this with the ordination or initiation formula that is still used in Ceylon—

"I put my trust in Buddha;
I put my trust in the Law;

I put my trust in the Priesthood;
Again I put my trust in Buddha;
Again I put my trust in the Law;
Again I put my trust in the Priesthood;
Once more I put my trust in Buddha;
Once more I put my trust in the Law;
Once more I put my trust in the Priesthood."

He quotes a favourite text, "Thus the Good Law will long endure," and cites seven passages of Scripture, five of which are identified in extant Buddhistic literature.

The Fourteen Rock Edicts form the most important group of inscriptions, containing a full account both of the principles and the practices of their royal author.

The First Edict is brief, dealing with one of the favourite themes—the sacredness of life—and recording with evident satisfaction how the daily slaughter of hundreds of thousands of animals for the royal table has been reduced to the killing of two peacocks and (sometimes) one antelope. In future even this amount of killing is to be discontinued. Even the killing of animals for sacrifice and the holding of a holiday feast are prohibited "here." "Here" is supposed to refer to Pataliputra, where both sacrifices and festivals, involving much killing, had been celebrated with more than ordinary extravagance. The lavish display of the royal kitchen was no doubt imitated by all those within the immediate influence of the court.

The Second Edict refers to the provision of comforts for man and beast that had been made not only throughout Asoka's empire but also in neighbouring friendly States to the south and west. Tree planting, well digging and the cultivation of medicinal herbs, roots and fruits—these are the "curative arrangements for men and beast" which His Sacred and Gracious Majesty specifies.

The Third Edict describes the Quinquennial Circuit by officials for the purpose of giving instruction in the Law of Piety,—obedience to parents; liberality to friends, acquaintances, relatives, Brahmans and ascetics; abstention from the slaughter of living creatures; and economy, which is defined as "small expense and small accumulation." The monastic communities are also instructed to appoint officials for checking stores and auditing accounts.

The Fourth Edict refers to the King's practice of the piety which he preached, the religious processions that have taken the place of the military pageants, and the virtues that have supplanted their corresponding vices, such as the killing of animals and unseemly behaviour towards relatives, Brahmans and ascetics. Like all great teachers, Asoka was not afraid of repeating himself; line upon line and precept upon precept, were his methods of instruction. As the repeated impact of a pith ball will in due time cause a suspended bar of iron to move, so the patient reiteration of simple rules is bound to make some impression even on the most obtuse minds. We must credit Asoka with the recognition of this principle, and need not ascribe the constant references to his own example and convictions entirely to vanity. In this Edict the sons, grandsons and great-grandsons of the King are exhorted to follow in his footsteps, promoting the practice of piety to the end of the cycle, and, abiding in piety and morality, to give instruction in the Law. In the Fifth Edict, we are told that "a good deed is a difficult thing," and that "sin is an easy thing." These moral maxims are quoted evidently with the object of justifying the system of Censors of the Law of Piety, an innovation introduced by Asoka. Their duty is to promote the establishment of piety and its increase among people of all denominations, not only among the King's own subjects but among the nations on the borders of the empire as well. Their duties are not to be merely didactic. They are employed to prevent wrongful imprisonment and other unjust punishments, and in helping the poor and aged in time of trouble, special consideration being shown to the man who has a large family. It is specially mentioned that at Pataliputra and in all the provincial towns the Censors are employed in supervising the female establishments of the King's brothers and sisters, as well as of his other relatives.

The Sixth Edict touches a sore point in Oriental administration, the prompt despatch of business. "All haste is of the Devil," says the Eastern proverb, and in affairs of State especially this malign influence should be carefully excluded. To remedy the evils of delay, however, Asoka is prepared to go almost any length. He announces

his willingness to receive reports at all times and in all places, whether he is dining (a very great concession, for one of the first rules of etiquette in India is not to disturb a man when he is eating), or in the ladies' apartments, or in his bedroom, or in his closet, or in his carriage,[1] or in the palace gardens. In this way he works unweariedly "for the welfare of all folk," and to discharge his debt to mankind. He hopes that his descendants will follow his example, but warns them that "it is a difficult thing save by the utmost exertion."

The Seventh Edict again urges men of every denomination to observe the Law. Even those who cannot practise lavish hospitality may devote themselves to the mastery of the senses, purity of mind, gratitude, and steadfastness.

The Eighth Edict relates to the "tours of piety," for the distribution of alms, religious instruction, and religious discussion, that have taken the place of the "tours of pleasure" for hunting and similar amusements. True Ceremonial is the theme of Edict number Nine. Formerly the people, especially the women, had been in the habit of performing what the King considered to be trivial and worthless ceremonies on domestic occasions, such as births, weddings, the undertaking of journeys, and in times of sickness. In his opinion, it will be more profitable to pay attention to the proper treatment of slaves and servants, to honour teachers, to be kind to animals, and to give liberally to Brahmans and ascetics. The two Edicts that follow, the Tenth and Eleventh, pursue the same or similar subjects. True Glory, says the former, is not to be obtained except by hearkening obediently to the Law and following its precepts. Difficult it is, however, to attain such freedom, save by the utmost exertion, giving up all other aims. There is no such almsgiving, says Edict Eleven, as is the almsgiving of the Law of Piety, friendship in piety, liberality in piety, kinship in piety. This consists in the proper treatment of slaves and servants, hearkening to father and mother, giving to friends, comrades, relatives, ascetics and Brahmans, and the sparing of living creatures.

[1] The meaning of the word translated as "carriage" is, says Mr. V. A. Smith, uncertain.

Toleration towards men of all sects is proclaimed in Edict number Twelve. His Sacred and Gracious Majesty the King does reverence to men of all sects, whether ascetics or householders, and he urges that this rule should be followed by all. In this way a man exalts his own sect, and at the same time does service to other sects. On the other hand, "he who does reverence to his own sect while disparaging the sects of other wholly from attachment to his own, with intent to enhance the splendour of his own sect, in reality by such conduct inflicts the severest injury on his own sect." His Majesty therefore desires that all sects should hear much teaching and hold sound doctrine. It is specifically mentioned in this Edict that among those who are employed to promote the observance of the Law of Piety there are Censers of Women.

The Thirteenth Edict may be quoted entire as a specimen of Asoka's style. The translation is that of Mr. Vincent A. Smith, who has not only given his consent to its reproduction here, but has also very kindly revised it for this purpose, making one or two emendations that his most recent researches have suggested. The Edict is of special interest, as it contains the fullest account Asoka has given us of his conversion and of his religious principles and efforts. The text quoted is that known as the Shahbazgarhi one:—

"Kalinga was conquered by His Sacred and Gracious Majesty the King when he had been consecrated eight years. One hundred and fifty thousand persons were thence carried away captive, one hundred thousand were there slain, and many times that number perished.

"Directly after the annexation of Kalinga, began His Sacred Majesty's zealous protection of the Law of Piety (or of Duty), his love of that Law, and his giving instruction in that Law (*dharma*). Thus arose His Majesty's remorse for having conquered Kalinga, because the conquest of a country previously unconquered involves the slaughter, death and carrying away captive of the people. This is a matter of profound sorrow and regret to His Sacred Majesty.

"There is, however, another reason for His Sacred Majesty feeling still more regret, inasmuch as in such a country dwell Brahmans or ascetics, or men of various denominations or householders, upon whom is laid this duty of hearkening to superiors, hearkening to father and mother, hearkening to teachers, and proper treatment of friends,

acquaintances, comrades, relatives, slaves, and servants, with fidelity of attachment. To such people in such a country befalls violence, or slaughter, or separation from their loved ones. Or misfortune befalls the friends, acquaintances, comrades and relatives of those who are themselves well protected, while their affection is undiminished. Thus for them also this is a mode of violence. And the share of this that falls on all men is matter of regret to His Sacred Majesty; because it is never the case that people have not faith in some one denomination or other.

"Thus of all the people who were slain, done to death, or carried away captive in Kalinga, if the hundredth or the thousandth part were to suffer the same fate, it would now be matter of regret to His Sacred Majesty. Moreover, should any one do him wrong, that, too, must be borne with by His Sacred Majesty, if it can possibly be borne with. Even upon the forest folk in his dominions His Sacred Majesty looks kindly and he seeks their conversion, for (if he did not) repentance would come to His Sacred Majesty. They are bidden to turn from evil ways that they be not chastised. For His Sacred Majesty desires that all animate things should have security, self-control, peace of mind and joyousness.

"And this is the chiefest conquest, in the opinion of His Sacred Majesty, the conquest by the Law of Piety—and this, again, has been won by His Sacred Majesty both in his own dominions and in all the neighbouring realms as far as six hundred leagues—where the Greek (Yona) King named Antiochos dwells, and north of that Antiochos to where dwell the four (4) kings severally named Ptolemy, Antigonas, Magasm, and Alexander; and in the south the (realms of the) Cholas and Pandyas, as far as (the) Tamraparni (river) likewise—and here, too, in the King's dominions, among the Yonas, and Kambojas, among the Bhojas and Pitinikas, among the Andhras and Pulindas—everywhere men follow His Sacred Majesty's instruction in the Law of Piety. Even where the envoys of His Sacred Majesty do not penetrate, there, too, men hearing His Sacred Majesty's ordinance, based on the Law of Piety and his instruction in that law, practise and will practise the Law.

"And, again, the conquest thereby won everywhere is everywhere a conquest full of delight. Delight is found in

the conquests made by the Law. That delight, however, is only a small matter. His Sacred Majesty regards as bearing much fruit only that which concerns the other world.

"And for this purpose has this pious Edict been written, in order that my sons and grandsons, who may be, should not regard it as their duty to conquer a new conquest. If, perchance, they become engaged in a conquest by arms, they should take pleasure in patience and gentleness, and regard as (the only true) conquest the conquest won by piety. That avails for both this world and the next. Let all joy be in effort, because that avails for both this world and the next."

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."[1] "What shall it profit, a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"[2] How Asoka would have enjoyed texts like these!

The Fourteenth Edict is an Epilogue. It contains an approach to an apology for the frequent repetitions, for which "the honeyed sweetness" of the subjects dealt with is offered as an excuse. The possibility of clerical errors is admitted, but as a matter of fact these Edicts were so carefully inscribed, even in the most distant places, that mistakes are exceedingly few.

The Kalinga Edicts, which take the place of the foregoing Edicts XI, XII and XIII, in the recensions in Orissa (Dhauli) and Ganjam (Jaugada), have already been referred to at some length. These Fourteen Edicts were published far and wide. Copies of them have been found in places ranging from Peshawar in the far north to Mysore in the south, from Kathiawar in the west to Orissa in the east. It is considered probable that there are more copies to be brought to light. Still further to the north-east of Peshawar, and over a thousand miles from Pataliputra, all the Fourteen Edicts except the Twelfth are inscribed on the eastern and western faces of a mass of trap rock, measuring twenty-four feet by ten, lying on a hillside. Edict XII, on Toleration, was discovered a few years ago by Sir Harold Deane on a separate rock about fifty yards distant from

[1] Proverbs, XVI, 32. [2] Mark's Gospel, VIII, 36.

the other. Mansahra, in Hazara, about fifteen miles north of Abbottabad, a place that lies on an ancient pilgrim route, is the site of another copy, less complete than that at Shahbazgarhi, which is in a very fine state of preservation. Here, too, the Toleration Edict has a place to itself, being inscribed on a different side of the rock.

What is regarded as the most perfect of all the versions was discovered in 1860 at Kalsi, in the Dehra Dun district, on the road from Saharanpur to Chakrata, and fifteen miles west of Mussoorie. It is inscribed on the face of a boulder of white quartz, overlooking the junction of the Jumna and Ton rivers. It is possible that this may have been in Asoka's time a place of pilgrimage. In this and in all the other inscriptions, except those in the far north-west, the Brahmi script, the parent of the Devanagari in which Hindi is now written, is used, the writing being from left to right. At Shahbazgarhi the character used is the Kharoshthi, which, of Persian origin, is quite different, being written from right to left.

Sopara, in the Thana district, to the north of Bombay, and Girnar in Kathiawar, are the locations of the western versions. Only a fragment, containing a few words from the Eighth Edict, has been found at Sopara. The Girnar version has the distinction of having been the first to attract the attention of modern scholars. It was first described by Colonel Tod in 1822. It had been discovered by accident, concealed in dense jungle, when a local magnate was making a road to enable Jain pilgrims to visit Girnar Hill, which, like many other hills, is held sacred by the Jains. The exact site lies between the Girnar and Datar Hills, on a huge mass of granite which in former days stood on the margin of the artificial Sudarsana Lake, which itself commemorated the Maurya kings. It was constructed by the order of Chandragupta, and watercourses and sluices had been added in the time of Asoka. On a different part of the same rock a later inscription (455 A.D.) records the bursting of the dam which confined the lake. Then there are the two recensions on the eastern side of India, at Dhauli in Orissa and Jaugada in Ganjam.

The Seven Pillar Edicts are popular appeals in which Asoka reviews his own acts. His devotion to the Law of

Piety is professed in the first and second. Self-examination is the theme of the third. The fourth defines the powers and prescribes the duties of the Commissioners (Rajukas), to whom the King commits the welfare of his people with all the confidence with which he would hand over his child to a skilful nurse. They are to ascertain the causes of happiness and unhappiness, and to exhort the people, through their subordinates, to make sure of the former and to get rid of the latter by observing the Law of Piety. The respite of three days granted to criminals condemned to death, that they may by meditation "gain the next world," is quoted as an example of the King's humanity.

The Fifth Edict deals with Regulations restricting the killing and mutilation of animals, not absolutely forbidding them. In the Sixth Edict the King declares his opinion that personal adherence to one's own creed is the main thing, and that his own desire is to promote the welfare and happiness of mankind, of all communities, irrespective of denomination.

The Seventh and last of the Pillar Edicts is the longest and the most important. It reviews generally the measures taken by the King for the propagation of the Law of Piety, making no mention, however, of the missions to foreign countries. The means taken to instruct the people in the Law are referred to at length. The planting of banyan trees on the roadside, to give shade to man and beast, and of groves of mango trees—in whose fruit, it has been said, you taste the Indian sunshine—the digging of wells every half-kos, or mile, along the roads, and the building of rest-houses and watering places are mentioned. There is in this Edict one of the few references we have to Asoka's domestic affairs, in a clause stating that officials are employed in the distribution of the royal alms, "both my own and those of the Queens" and also "the alms of my sons and of the Princes, the Queens' sons." The distinction was made, if not in Asoka's lifetime, at any rate among his followers, between the Princes, the *Kumara* or sons of the Queens, and the royal offspring by other women. As regards the relation of the sexes and the position of women, it is probable that Asoka left the world very much as he found it. It is a mere conjecture that his own wives were four in number; it is a matter he does not consider worth mentioning. Rever-

ence to the aged, however, and the seemly treatment not only of Brahmans and ascetics, but also of the poor and wretched, "yea, even of slaves and servants," are enumerated among the virtues in which the King has set an example which he hopes others will imitate. Still, while pious regulations are meritorious, meditation is of much greater importance. If that is duly cultivated the objects that are sought by the regulations will speedily be attained.

The Minor Pillar Edicts are four in number. The Sarnath Edict denounces the sin of schism, and two others, the Kausambi and the Sanchi, deal with the same matter, for it is the desire of the King that "the Way of the Church may long endure." The fourth is known as the Queen's Edict. In it Asoka commands high officials everywhere to take note that whatever donation has been made by the Second Queen, be it a mango-grove, pleasure-garden, charitable hostel (or *Dharmasala*), or aught else, is to be accounted as the act of that Queen. Here, again, the purdah has been lifted a little. The Edict adds, as if to make it plain beyond the possibility of error, that all transactions of this kind are for the acquisition of merit by the Second Queen, Tivara's mother, the Karuvaki. The inference is that the Second Queen was the favourite, and the mother of the Prince who was to have succeeded his father but who probably died before him. The name, Karuvaki, was the Queen's family, not her personal, name; it simply means that she belonged to the Karuvaki race. There was to be no risk of her works of merit being put to the credit of anyone else.

Of the Commemorative Inscriptions found in the Tarai, that on the Rummindei Pillar commemorates Asoka's visit to the birthplace of Gautama, the Venerable One, and declares that the village of Lummini is to be made free of religious cesses and entitled to an eighth share of the local land revenue. The other, the Nigliva Pillar inscription, states that Asoka, fourteen years after his consecration, enlarged for the second time the *stupa* of Buddha Konakamana, evidently a former incarnation of Buddha, and that six years later he came in person to do reverence to it and erected the Pillar. The *stupa* referred to has not been identified. The cave dedications which have already been described complete the list. They are three in number, dedicating the same

number of caves in the Barabar Hills to the Ajivikas as long as the sun and moon endure. The Nagarjuni inscriptions do not belong to Asoka, but closely resemble the foregoing. By means of them Dasaratha, immediately after his consecration, assigns three caves as a dwelling place for the venerable Ajivikas, for the same period.

The Seven Pillar Edicts have been found complete only on one of the pillars, that which was removed from Topra to Delhi. The inscribed pillars which have been discovered are ten in number. In addition to the Delhi Topra pillar they are the Delhi-Mirath (Meerut) pillar, also transported, which contains Edicts I-VI, much mutilated; the Allahabad pillar, containing the same Edicts and also the Queen's and the Kausambi Edicts, all imperfect; the Lauriya Araraj pillar in Champaran, in which the first six Edicts are almost perfect; the Lauriya-Nandangarh pillar, also in Champaran, containing the same edicts practically perfect; the fallen pillar at Rampurwa, also in Champaran, containing the first six Edicts well preserved; the Sanchi pillar containing portions of the Minor Pillar Edicts; the Sarnath pillar with the same in fuller form; and the Rummindei and Nigliva commemorative pillars.

It is possible that more pillars may yet be discovered. The Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang, mentions sixteen of them, and of those only two can be identified unmistakably with pillars that are included in the group just described.

In the chapter on Early Buddhism it was said that the faith as preached by its founder denied individual immortality, and took no thought of personal happiness in a future state. Few men are entirely consistent, and the reader of the Edicts cannot fail to notice the frequent appeals that are made to future happiness as the reward of merit and as an incentive to virtue. Towards the close of the seventh Pillar Edict Asoka expresses a hope that his sons and descendants will conform to the principles set forth, "as long as sun and moon endure," for by such conformity "the gain both of this world and the next is assured." Similar phrases are found in the Rock Edicts. "The ceremonial of Piety," we read in Edict IX, "even if it fails to attain the desired end in this world, certainly begets endless merit in the other world." All the King's exertions

are "for the sake of the life hereafter," he tells us in Edict X. "Let all joy be in effort, because that avails both for this world and the next" (Rock Edict XIII). The King desires that all men may have every kind of happiness, "both in this world and the next," says the Borderers' Edict, and the same idea recurs in the Provincials' Edict. It was the ethical side of Buddhism that appealed to Asoka, and he seems to have felt that he could not dispense with a motive that served as a strong inducement to men to do good and to avoid evil. He was a philanthropist first, and a metaphysician afterwards. From the Christian point of view, the fatal defect in his system was his self-sufficiency. He left God out of account. He ignored man's responsibility to Him and his dependence on His grace. A man's hope lies entirely in his own exertions, nor has he any one to fear but himself. It would, however, be unreasonable to blame Asoka because he was ignorant of truth that had not at that time been revealed, and we should estimate the value of his achievements by the standards of his own time. We should compare his deeds and his doctrine with those of the age and of the country in which he lived; seen from this point of view Asoka's figure is one of great and abiding moral grandeur. His example, too, in seeking to share with all mankind the blessings of his religion, will always be a rebuke to those who are indifferent towards the duty of making known to others the greatest gift they have received.

VI.

ASOKA'S PLACE IN HISTORY

THAT Asoka has a place in history is beyond dispute. A great deal of myth has accumulated round his name. In the humid climate of Ceylon especially the growth of legend has been very luxuriant; but we are conscious at once of a change of atmosphere when we pass from the tales which his admirers have invented about him to his own record on rock and pillar.

One tribute to the greatness of Asoka is the frequency with which comparisons have been made between him and other monarchs who have also achieved fame in the religious sphere, eastern and western, ancient and modern, pagan, Moslem and Christian. For the theocratic idea, that God is the real ruler of the State, the king being only His servant and representative, we naturally turn to the Kingdom of Israel in the days of its greatest glory under David and Solomon. But the peculiarity of Asoka's theocracy, as Mr. Vincent Smith says, was that it was a theocracy without God, while the idea of God, on the other hand, is the dominating fact in Old Testament history.

The most familiar comparison is with the Emperor Constantine, the royal patron of Christianity, whose conversion, in the year 325 A.D., has often been regarded as the turning point in the early history of the religion of Jesus. Asoka is often described as the Constantine of Buddhism, and it may be added that there is at least this point in common between the two men that the verdict of history is not unanimous regarding the final effect of their religious patronage. The conversion of Asoka has been described as "the first great step on the downward path of Buddhism, the first step to its expulsion from India,"[1] just

[1] See Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, p. 222.

as the rich domains by which Constantine endowed the Church have been looked upon as its spiritual impoverishment. Here, some people would say, the comparison ends. There is ample evidence that Christianity had made much more substantial progress at the time of Constantine than Buddhism had made when Asoka ascended the throne at Pataliputra. Constantine, it may be said with safety, had much more to gain by becoming a Christian than Asoka had by embracing Buddhism. Constantine, says a recent writer, "was gifted, inasmuch as he clearly recognised and firmly grasped what was inevitable. It was not by aid of anything artificial or arbitrary that he laid down the basal principles of his imperial State church; what he did was to let the leading provinces have the religion they desired. Whereupon other provinces had simply to follow suit." "All that was needed was an acute and forceful statesman, and one who at the same time had a vital interest in the religious situation. Such a man was Constantine."[1]

A similar view is taken by a still more recent writer in reviewing Professor E. J. Rapson's book on Ancient India. The author of this work, says its anonymous critic, should not have mentioned the familiar comparison of Asoka with Constantine without pointing out its radical incongruity. "Constantine," he goes on to say, "espoused a winning cause; Asoka put himself at the head of an unpopular religious reform."[2] There are permutations of opinion among experts on questions of this kind, and perhaps the most recent of all opinions, based on archæological discoveries, is that Buddhism was more widespread in India at the time of Asoka's accession than scholars have hitherto supposed. It is true that Gautama's personal ministry was confined to a small part of North India, but it was in the same part of India that the Maurya empire had its centre, and the tendency of recent research has been to allow a somewhat longer interval to elapse between the advent of Buddha and the appearance of Asoka upon the stage. Then the very simplicity of Asoka's Edicts, the absence of explanation or

[1] Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. II, p. 466.

[2] *Times* "Literary Supplement," August 7, 1914.

even of any distinct reference to Buddha, seem to strengthen the view that the new faith had become familiar to men and had already won a larger measure of popular favour than external evidence would lead us to suppose. Allowance must be made for the fluctuation of opinion, but it is probable that it is the name of Constantine that will continue to be quoted most frequently along with that of Asoka.

Midway between the beginning of the Christian era and the age of Constantine stands Marcus Aurelius, who, philosopher though he was, persecuted the faith which Constantine patronised. To John Stuart Mill it was a bitter thought how different a thing the Christianity of the world might have been, if the Christian faith had been adopted as the religion of the empire under the auspices of Marcus Aurelius instead of those of Constantine.[1] And if Asoka had had the culture of Marcus Aurelius, says a writer who has frequently been quoted in these pages, it might have saved him from being blinded by the glamour of his high position. He might have been a greater man, but he would have been less interesting. He would not have attempted the impossible, and we would have had no edicts.[2]

It is natural that Asoka should be compared to King Alfred, the best beloved of all the ancient kings of England. He, like Asoka, has become the hero of many stories of doubtful authenticity, but like Asoka he won enduring fame by solid achievements. He was to the end more of a man of war than Asoka, and the fact that he founded the English navy would alone entitle him to enduring fame. We have only scanty information about Asoka's navy, but we know from Megasthenes that there was such an institution, organised as part of the army, and one would like to know whether the missionaries to Ceylon made the journey by sea or as far as possible by land. It was, however, in the internal administration of their respective kingdoms—although Alfred's in extent and wealth was a mere parcel of ground compared with Asoka's—in their zeal for justice and in their encourage-

[1] *Liberty*, chap. II. [2] Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*.

Omar Khaliff I, whose comparatively brief spell of power, up to 644 A.D., witnessed most of the great territorial conquests of Islam, was another ruler who in many respects resembled Asoka. A powerful and commanding personality, he made his influence felt in every department of the State and to the furthest confines of his vast empire. He did not take the field himself, but controlled all operations, military and political, from Medina. Nor did he allow the glory of conquest to obscure his mental vision. He even sought to place a limit to the extent of Moslem expansion, believing that a too extensive empire might be a source of weakness rather than of power; on the other hand, he strove with much energy and success to consolidate the forces of Islam at the centre. His ideal for the Arab nation was that it should be a great host of the Lord, every citizen a soldier. He forbade his men to acquire land in the countries subdued—all was to belong to the State, to support the army. Omar, too, was great as an administrator. He began his reign by proclaiming a principle worthy of being inscribed on the everlasting rocks: "By God, he that is weakest among you shall be in my sight the strongest, until I have vindicated for him his rights; but him that is strongest will I treat as the weakest, until he complies with the laws."

The circumstances of Omar's untimely death raise at least the suspicion that the financial system of the State was one of its weak points. An immense amount of wealth poured into the treasury, and plunder was no doubt regarded as being as legitimate as conquest. Omar himself may not have been chiefly responsible for the faults of his policy, but in some measure he atoned for them by his death. He was fatally stabbed in the mosque at Medina by a workman who had been driven to desperation by fiscal oppression.

It is, however, in another great Muhammadan ruler, the Emperor Akbar, that we find a closer parallel, at least as far as external conditions are concerned, to Asoka. Each of them was the most distinguished member in a powerful dynasty of Indian rulers. Akbar, ruling over an empire that included all India north of the Vindhya Hills, occupied the place among the Moghul monarchs that Asoka held in the line of

Chandragupta. Both were great administrators, ruling by the divine right of good government, and both, in different ways, made their mark in the religious history of the East. A contemporary of Queen Elizabeth—and of Shakespeare—Akbar has the advantage of standing much nearer to us in point of time than Asoka; he is to us more of a creature of flesh and blood, while the impression we have of the great Buddhistic emperor is of a figure not unlike one of his own pillars, severely upright but somewhat impassive. Still, while the effect of Akbar's political policy is still felt in India, in the strictly religious sphere his influence has been of a much less permanent nature.

Akbar's chief political achievement was that he not only recovered parts of the empire which his father, Humayun, had lost through the rebellion of Sher Khan, and through fresh conquests made it even more extensive than it had been before, but also that by good administration he made the realm more prosperous, peaceful and contented than it ever had been under the Moghuls or for centuries before. As a great and successful Indian monarch, in fact, Akbar may be said to have been the successor, *longo intervallo*, of Asoka. Moslem though he was, Akbar stands in the history of India as the apostle of religious toleration, and toleration was a more difficult problem in his day than it had been in the time of Asoka. His economic and social reforms—he ordered that no widow should be burned along with her dead husband, unless she seriously wished to be burned; prohibited infant marriage; and decreed that Hindu widows might remarry—probably did less to establish other creeds than his own. His predecessors had raised revenue from the capitation tax upon all non-Muhammadans. Akbar abolished this, and also the tax upon pilgrimages, which must have been very unpopular. He granted the Hindus full liberty of worship. His prayer, interpreted by an English poet, was—

> "for power to fuse
> My myriads into union under one;
> To hunt the tiger of oppression out
> From office: and to spread the Divine Faith
> Like calming oil on all their stormy creeds,
> And fill the hollows between wave and wave;
> To nurse my children on the milk of Truth,

And alchemise old hates into the gold
Of Love, and make it current."[1]

Akbar's creed, however, was less clear-cut than Asoka's, and he was much less effective as a missionary. "To nurse my children on the milk of Truth" is a description that applies more closely to Asoka's aim than to Akbar's. The "Divine Faith" which the latter sought to propagate was an eclectic system. He endeavoured to find out all that the other religions had to teach him, sending for the Portuguese priests from Goa and listening attentively to their instruction in the doctrines of Christianity. The result was a creed of pure deism, with a ritual borrowed from the Parsis; but the new religion neither spread far nor lasted long. It was practically confined to the royal court, and died with its founder. In this respect, at least, the relation between Asoka and Akbar was one of contrast.

Asoka, in fact, is not likely to suffer from comparison with any of his fellow-monarchs of the ancient world. As a ruler of men, his grasp may have come short of his ambition, but the ambition was a noble one, and the grasp was a great and earnest effort to fulfil the high duties of his office. He strove manfully to lessen the sum of human suffering, to increase the sum of human happiness, "to do all the good he could, in all the ways he could, to all the people he could." To us it seems almost inconceivable that one man can have borne upon his own shoulders the burden of the personal and highly centralised government of so extensive an empire, under a system that sought to regulate the religion and the domestic life of his subjects as well as all the affairs of State. He did so, however, for forty years, and there is nothing to show that he ever felt the task to be beyond his powers.

Asoka was a philanthropist, regal not only in rank but also in the scale and scope of his benefactions. But he was more. He says himself, in the Seventh Pillar Edict, after recounting his humane regulations and arrangements, that in these respects former kings have done as he has done, but that in his case the end in view is that "men may conform to the Law of Piety." He used the physical as an avenue

[1] Tennyson, *Akbar's Dream.*

to the spiritual. He sought by benevolence to win the hearts of men to the faith. It is as a preacher of

> "That wisdom which hath made our Asia mild,
> Whereto four thousand lakhs of living souls
> Witness this day,"[1]

that the memory of Asoka is still fragrant.

In the history of one of the great religions of the world,—the greatest of all the non-Christian religions, if reckoned by the number of human lives it has influenced—Asoka holds a place of importance second only to that of the founder himself. In this way he perhaps stands nearer to Paul than to any other historical character. Although the message proclaimed by Jesus was essentially universal, His immediate followers were slow to realise what this meant, and for a time Christianity seemed to be in danger of degenerating into a new sect of Judaism, more enlightened and liberal than any other, but still bound by the bonds of legalism and racial prejudice. It was Paul who broke the spell. Other Christian teachers were willing to widen the door of the Church to admit the Gentiles. Paul said, "No, there must be, there is, no door, for there is no wall. Every partition has been broken down; every restriction and distinction and division among men in the sight of God has been abolished. The love of God is as all-embracing as the sky above us; His grace is as free as the air we breathe. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female."

In the same way Buddhism, as Asoka found it, was an Indian sect. He made it a world religion, not by adding to, or modifying or improving on, it, but by emphasising the elements of universality that it had always contained. He realised and acted on the truth that true religion is personal and spritual, not a matter of ceremonial or of ritual, but of conviction and conduct. He set at naught the claims of priestly privilege and prerogative and he rose above all distinctions of race. He patronised the Brahmans, for all men were his children—and perhaps the severest test of catholicity is to apply it to those who oppose it—but he did not need them. It was every man for himself; let small and great

[1] *The Light of Asia*, Book VIII.

exert themselves. Asoka did not accomplish all he aimed at. Some at least of his missions to foreign lands seem to have produced no direct fruit. But men were no doubt in many cases influenced by his example and teaching, even if they were not enrolled among his converts, and that he strove so earnestly to extend over three continents the faith that he professed will be to his everlasting credit.

It is easy for us at this time of day to point out defects and limitations in the creed that Asoka preached and to criticise his methods. To estimate aright, however, the good which he accomplished, we must bear in mind the conditions under which he lived and worked. The merit of a reformer is to be gauged by comparing the state of affairs as he found them with their condition as the result of his efforts. Asoka's creed may be defective, but how does it compare with the other creeds of that day? There were flaws in his system of government, no doubt, but did men anywhere at that time live under a more gracious and benevolent ruler? "The ears of a Sudra," the Brahmans had decreed, "who listens intentionally when the Veda is being recited, are to be filled with molten lead. His tongue is to be cut out if he recites it. His body is to be split in twain if he preserves it in his memory."[1] So much for Brahman exclusiveness, and for the encouragement of popular religion and the education of the masses. Asoka's creed was certainly an improvement on this.

Then the doctrine of transmigration, as it was being preached in Asoka's day, must have become an intolerable burden, turning existence itself into a nightmare. Gosala, the founder of the Ajivika sect, has been mentioned. The doctrine as elaborated by him—and he, too, was a reformer—taught that to reach perfection a man must pass through 8,400,000 great periods, or *mahakalpas*. And how much is a *mahakalpa?* The bed of the Ganges, Gosala replied, is 2,500 miles long, two miles broad, and 300 feet deep. Suppose there were a series of seven such rivers, each in the series being seven times as long as the preceding one, so that the seventh is equal to 117,649 Ganges rivers on end. If every hundred years one grain of sand be removed, the

[1] Quoted by Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 118.

time required to exhaust the seven rivers of their sand would be equal to one *saras* period, and 300,000 of such *saras* make one *mahakalpa* out of the 8,400,000![1]

It was from mental tortures such as this, from vain speculation, and from the most rigid and uncompromising sacerdotalism, that Asoka called men back to the moral law. To turn from such teaching as that of Gosala to the Edicts is to welcome a breath of fresh air and to get a glimpse of sunshine after wandering in dark and suffocating dungeons. Asoka must have made life happier for great multitudes of people, not only by the measures he took for their physical comfort, but by teaching them to live useful lives and think noble thoughts.

The religious history of Asoka is one of profound significance, and it has many lessons to teach us to-day. For one thing, it proves the possibility, in spite of all we hear about the "unchanging East," of vast, far-reaching religious reforms and spiritual movements taking place in India and elsewhere in Asia. The familiar lines of Kipling—

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till earth and sky stand presently, at God's great Judgment Seat,"

are quoted perhaps too often; we hear too seldom the lines that follow:—

"But there is neither East nor West, Border nor Breed nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!"

More than two thousand years ago the barriers of Border and Breed and Birth gave way before the impulse of religious conviction and missionary enthusiasm.

We are reminded, too, that the new religious impulse may come from an unexpected quarter. "I was no prophet," cried Amos, "neither was I a prophet's son." He was but a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit when the Lord took him as he followed the flock and sent him to prophesy to Israel. Asoka, one of India's greatest prophets, it is worth while repeating, owed nothing to birth or to

[1] See art. by Dr. A. F. R. Hoernle, in Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religions*, on Ajivikas, Vol. I.

caste. It is true that his rank and wealth gave him special facilities for carrying out his religious campaign; but he had not the remotest claim to priestly authority or privilege. Paul was not a king, but he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin; Asoka was a king, but he possessed neither blue blood nor wore the sacred thread. Though he was a layman, and probably not of high caste,[1] he struck a blow for religious freedom under which, for a time, the stronghold of Brahman exclusiveness was shaken to its foundations. As a seeker after truth, Asoka rejoiced in the light that was given to him. He made good use of the talents that were entrusted to him. He was a faithful steward. Remote as he is from us in point of time, we feel that his life has enriched ours. His voice still speaks to us, for it is the utterance of a sincere and earnest soul. He is part of the heritage of which India may well feel proud, and his example should inspire the young men of India to-day with the noble ambition to spend their lives for the moral and spiritual progress of their country and for the temporal and eternal welfare of their fellowmen.

[1] Dr. D. B. Spooner, lecturing at Simla on September 6th, 1915, on the results of the excavations at Pataliputra, propounded the theory, not only that the Asokan palace there was a replica of the Hall of One Hundred Pillars which Darius built at Persepolis, but that it was designed for Zoroastrian worship, and further, that not only were the Maurya kings Persian by race and of the Zoroastrian religion, but that Buddha himself was of the same stock, the Sakya tribe having been of Iranian descent. Both Buddha and Asoka, in fact, were renegades from the Parsi religion. Thus Buddhism was "the product of Hindu thought operating on an Iranian body domiciled in India long enough to have become acclimatized and to be ripe for a *rapprochement* with the Hindus." The caves which Asoka cut out of the Barabar Hills, near Gaya, are, we are told, the oldest caves in India, and are modelled on the royal rock-cut tombs of ancient Persia. Scholars are by no means certain that this theory is true.

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